THE ULTIMATE FOOTBALL GUIDE
NFL PREVIEW
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THE ULTIMATE FOOTBALL GUIDE

NFL '24 PREVIEW

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Buffalo Bills
Jalen Hurts
Philadelphia
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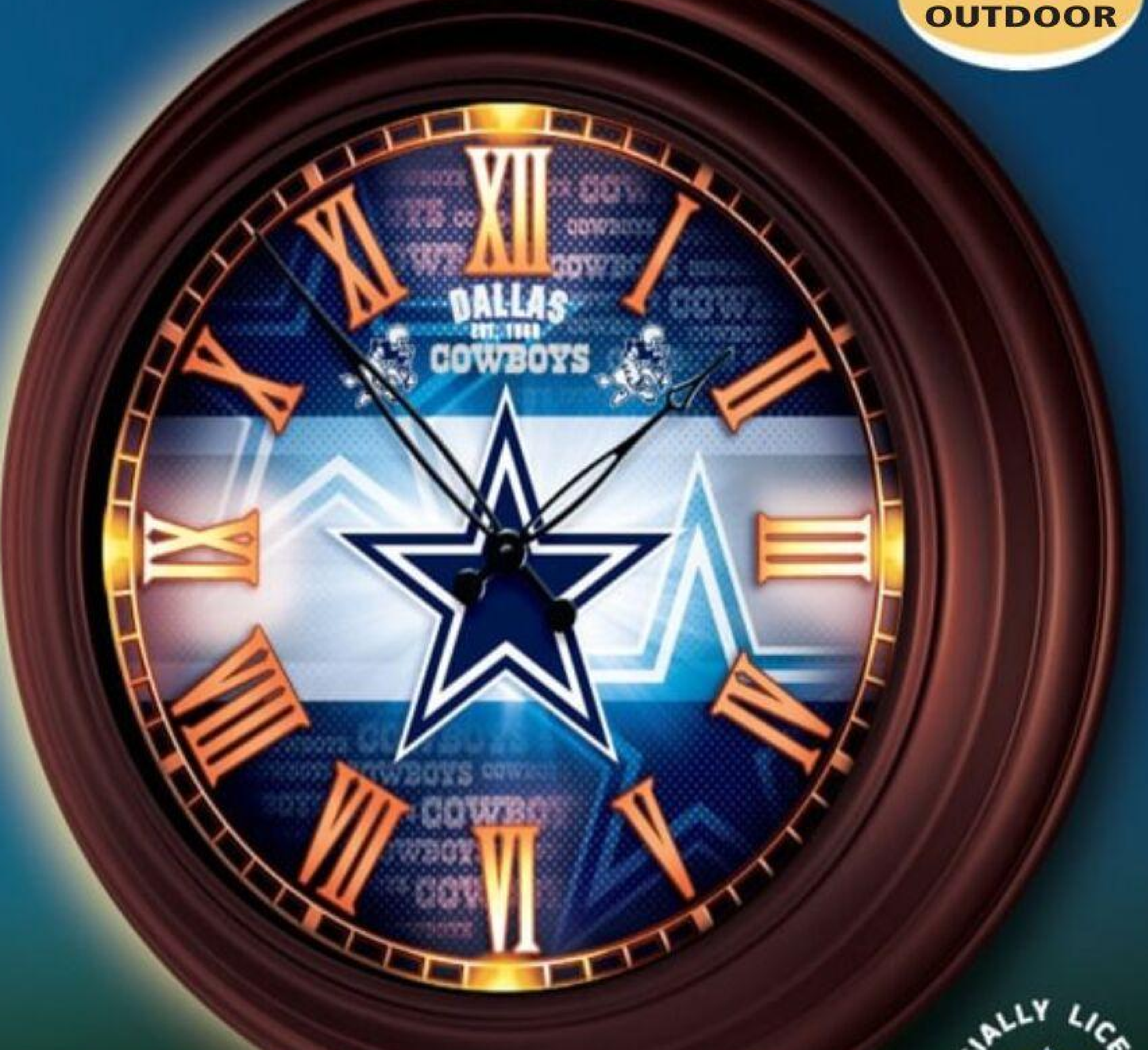

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YOUR GUIDE TO NFL 2024

IT WILL BE another year for the ages. The 105th season of NFL play begins with Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes wondering which finger to put his third Super Bowl ring on, with the other 31 teams hoping to get sized up for the same piece of jewelry. Welcome to your 2024 Ultimate Football Guide, which goes deep on each team in the league—top players lost and gained, a look at high and low points from last year and an assessment of where they're headed this year. You'll also find photos of the greatest plays of last season, our favorite fantasy picks and how and where to watch every game on your home TV or device. Enjoy!

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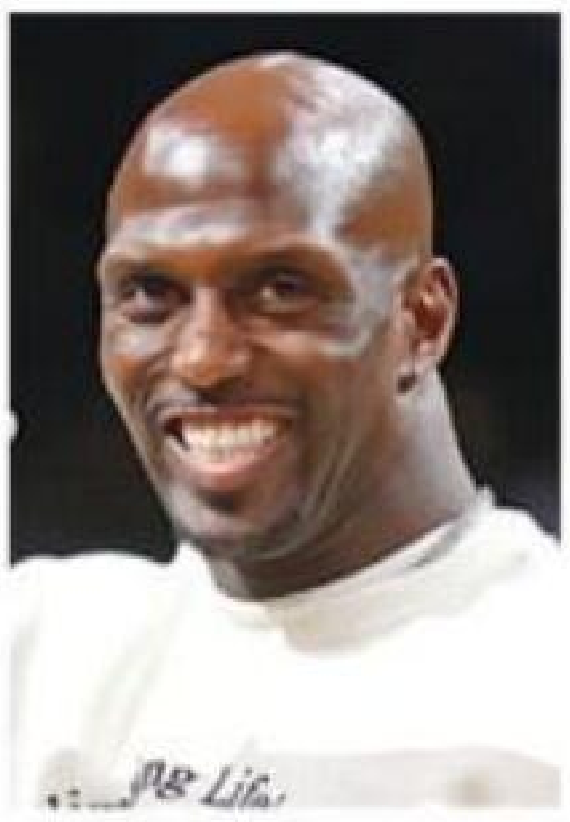

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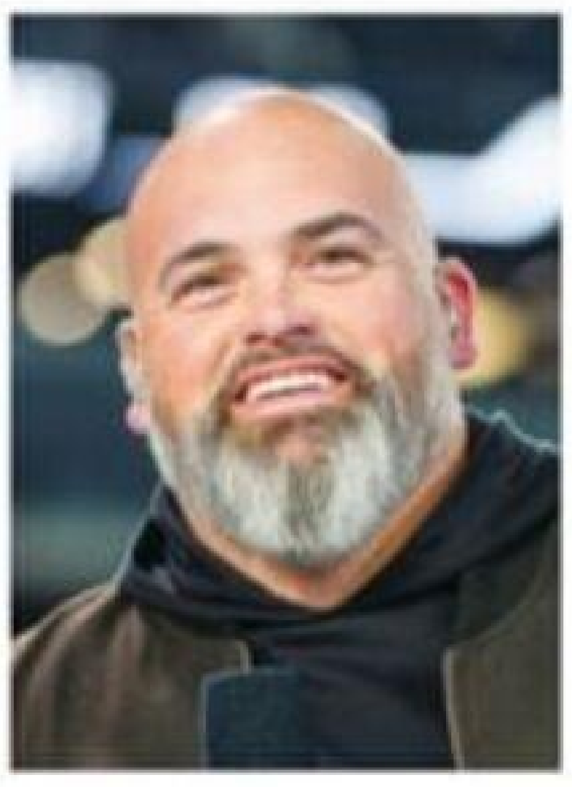

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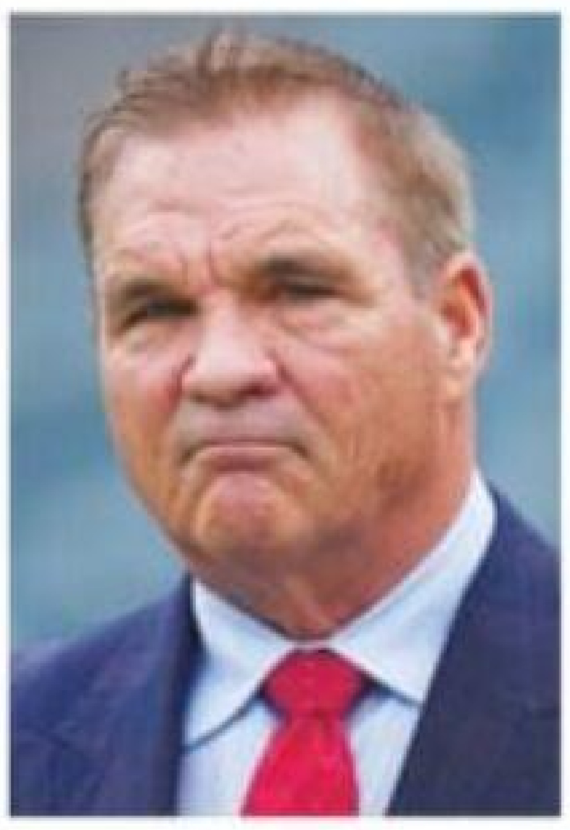

BRIAN BALDINGER
NFL Network

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THE 5 BIG

The 2024 season kicks off with plenty of intriguing unknowns. Here's what we'll be looking at most.

BY P.A. SCHWARTZ

NOT LONG AFTER the confetti was swept up inside Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas and "Chiefs: 25, 49ers: 22 in overtime in Super Bowl LVIII" was part of history, thoughts drifted to which team would be hailed and celebrated one year later, in Super Bowl LIX inside Caesars Superdome in New Orleans.

This is the way the NFL loves it—no gaps, no respite, all acceleration. The league thrives on "more." That includes more streaming platforms. (Netflix will stream two Christmas games and other major streamers will simulcast network showings.) More gambling promotions. Serious talk about more games. (The teams play 17 per season...for now, but commissioner Roger Goodell likes the idea of 18, and he doesn't love preseason.) More fantasy football. (About 30 million Americans play annually). More ratings (now averaging 17.9 million viewers per game). More games outside of the United States. (The five international games this season include the first contest ever held in Brazil).

Expect more of everything as the 2024 season kicks off. The Chiefs will be looking to win a third consecutive Super Bowl, something no team has done. New faces on the field at quarterback and new voices in the booth ensure a freshness that allows the NFL to keep the league growing.

There is always so much to consider when thinking of what comes next. Here are five storylines to take to the couch and tune in to for the start of another NFL campaign.

> "This whole industry is built on the backs of great quarterbacks. You can't win without one."
>
> **Brian Baldinger**

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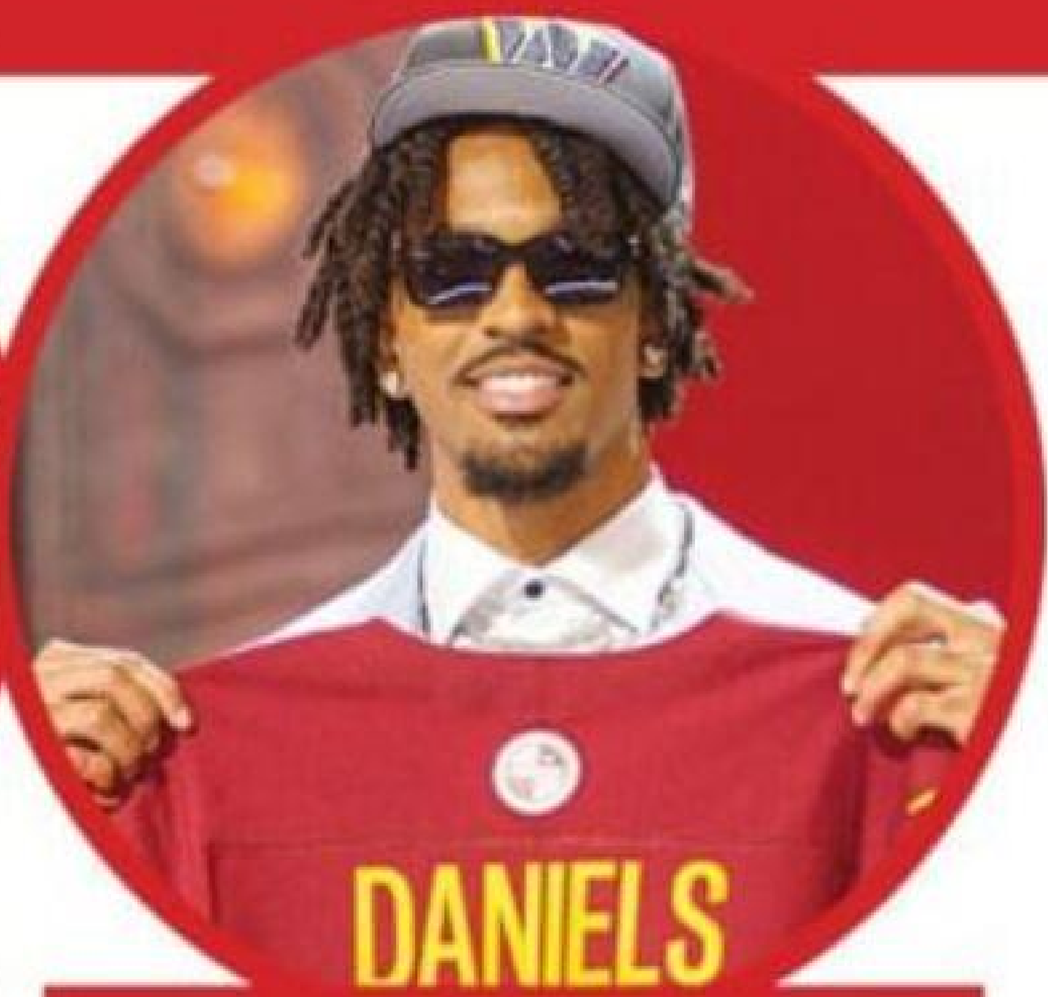
J.J. MCCARTHY
In three seasons at Michigan, he threw 49 TDs and only 11 interceptions.



JAYDEN DANIELS
In the mold of Lamar Jackson, he's both a gifted passer and rusher.

1 SIX QBS SELECTED IN THE FIRST ROUND

NEVER IN THE history of the NFL has there been such a rush to take quarterbacks as there was in the 2024 NFL Draft. Six of them went in the first round, matching the epic 1983 draft. That draft was remarkable—John Elway, Jim Kelly and Dan Marino are all Hall of Famers from that class—but this year was different. For the first time ever, six quarterbacks came off the board in the first 12 picks.

The consensus No. 1 quarterback this year, Caleb Williams from USC, is tasked with turning around the Chicago Bears' fortunes. Jayden Daniels from LSU, taken No. 2, is the savior-apparent for the Washington Commanders. Drake Maye from North Carolina went No. 3 to the Patriots. The Falcons made Michael Penix Jr. from Washington the No. 8 overall pick (even though, one month earlier, the team signed veteran QB Kirk Cousins). J.J. McCarthy, fresh off winning a national championship at Michigan, went No. 10 to the Vikings. The Broncos at No. 12 took Oregon's Bo Nix.

NFL Network analyst Brian

MICHAEL PENIX JR.
Finished college play very strong after a raft of injuries cut seasons short.

CALEB WILLIAMS
The 2022 Heisman Trophy winner has lots of arm strength.

GEST STORIES

DRAKE MAYE
Tall, athletic and steady, he excels at ball placement and seems ready to start.

Baldinger says he's excited to see Williams and Daniels play: "I'd be surprised if either one of those guys are a clunker through this season."

The last time three QBs were selected in the first three picks was 2021; that should serve as a cautionary tale for the teams banking that their rookie QBs will thrive. From that year, Zach Wilson (Jets) and Trey Lance (49ers) have already been jettisoned by the teams that were so high on them not long ago. Trevor Lawrence remains a keeper with the Jaguars.

BO NIX
Makes adjustments under pressure; comes to the league with five years' college experience.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JOHN SMOLEK/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES; MADDIE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES; ROB TRINGALI/SPORTSCHROME/GETTY IMAGES; TODD ROSENBERG/GETTY IMAGES

2

JETS HOPE TO FLY HIGH WITH RODGERS

THE NFL IN 2023 was all-in on the Jets and Aaron Rodgers, assigning them five primetime games and a spot in the first Black Friday game on Prime Video. Infamously, during the first *Monday Night Football* game of the season, the fascination with the Jets and their 39-year-old future Hall of Fame QB lasted exactly four snaps. That is how long it took for Rodgers to suffer a season-ending ruptured Achilles tendon.

Rodgers is back, healed and now 40, and the NFL has bought in, again. The Jets are one of only three teams in 2024 with six primetime games. (The others: the defending NFC champion 49ers and the perennial ratings-powerhouse Cowboys.) The Jets haven't made the playoffs for 13 seasons, but after going 7–10 in 2023, they bolstered their offensive line with left tackle Tyron Smith from the Cowboys, and their wide receiver corps with Mike Williams (who was released by the Chargers), to go along with a strong defense. Hopes are high. And in a case of déjà vu, they'll start the season on *Monday Night Football*, playing at San Francisco.

"We feel like the Jets kind of owe us one," Mike North, NFL VP of broadcast planning, said on a video conference after the schedule's release. "There's no question we're counting on them. Hopefully [Rodgers] stays healthy, and hopefully they're relevant."

Is that a reasonable expectation? Fox Sports play-by-play announcer Kenny Albert believes so. "It wasn't too long ago he was back-to-back MVP, in 2020 and 2021," he says. "If he could stay healthy, I think they could do some really good things."

3 TOM BRADY IN THE BOOTH

WE KNOW TOM Brady can take a hit on the field. No one lasts 23 years, 335 regular season games and 48 postseason games without being able to take a licking and keep on ticking. We also know he can take a verbal hit; his live roast on Netflix proved his well-moisturized and wrinkle-free skin is thicker than anyone anticipated.

Now we all get to find out how Brady breaks down a game, as he moves from his unparalleled playing career directly into the hot seat on the Fox No. 1 NFL broadcast team as their lead analyst alongside play-by-play man Kevin Burkhardt. "Think about it: Two minutes left in a big game, who better to analyze it than Tom Brady?" Burkhardt said recently.

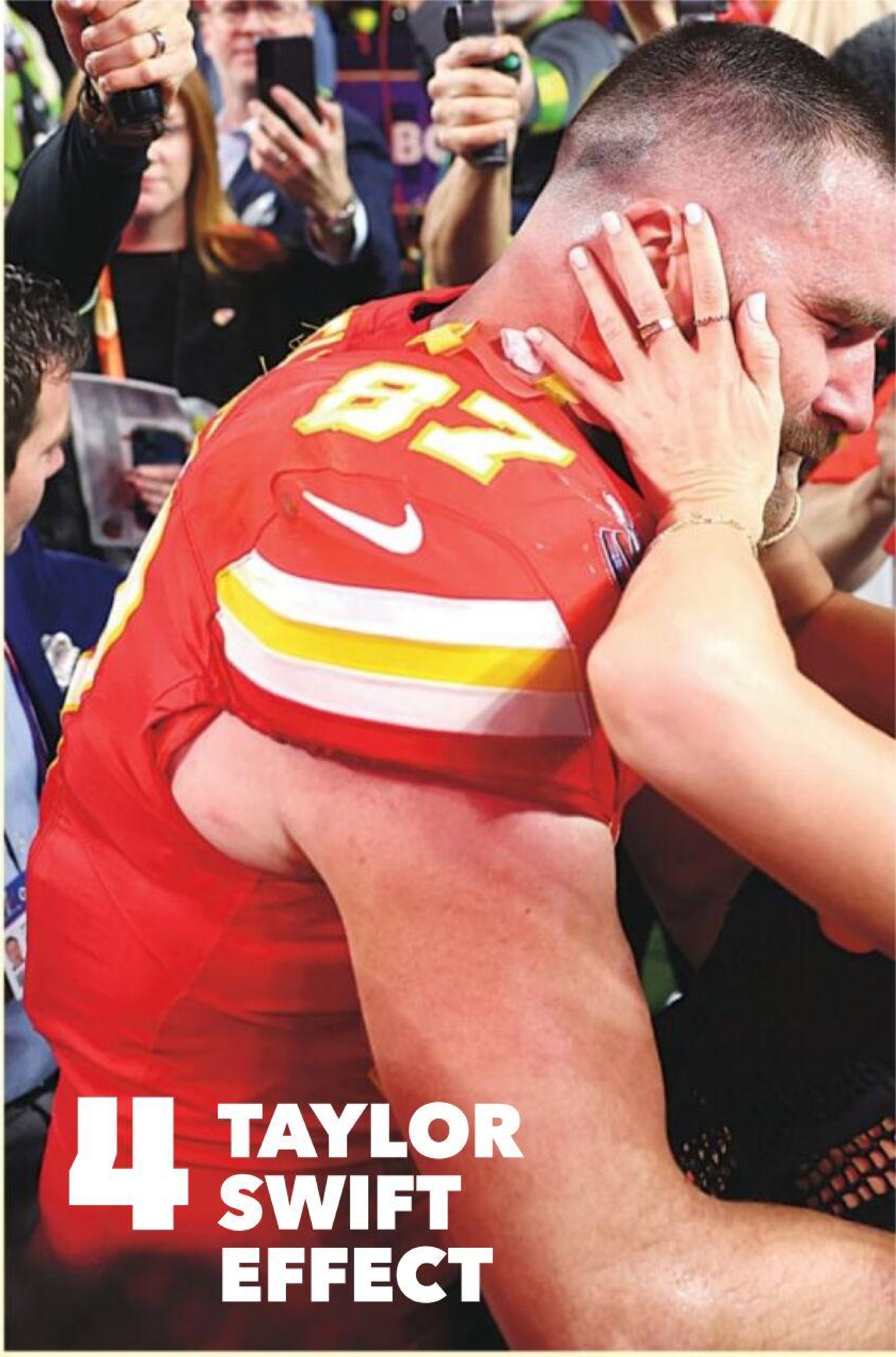
In 2022 and 2023, Burkhardt was paired with Greg Olsen on Fox's top NFL broadcast team, to very positive reviews. Olsen's 14-year playing career produced 742 receptions and 60 touchdowns, but once Brady expressed interest in TV, the former tight end stood no chance of retaining his status. Olsen was bumped to the Fox second NFL team, even though in May he won his second straight Sports Emmy. No pressure for Brady, right?

Fox Sports gave Brady a 10-year deal worth a reported $375 million. He makes his regular-season debut in Cleveland in Week 1, calling the Cowboys–Browns game.

"I think he's very bright," NFL Network analyst Brian Baldinger says. "I'm curious to see if he gets critical when he has to and if he takes away from just the celebration of the game. I'm interested in how he's going to navigate it."

Baldinger adds, "The fans are all over every statistic. If you get a pronunciation of a name wrong, they're critical. There's going to be Tom Brady hate on social media. He's got thick skin about it, but he's going to get tested pretty quick."

FOX SPORTS
FOX SPORTS



4 TAYLOR SWIFT EFFECT

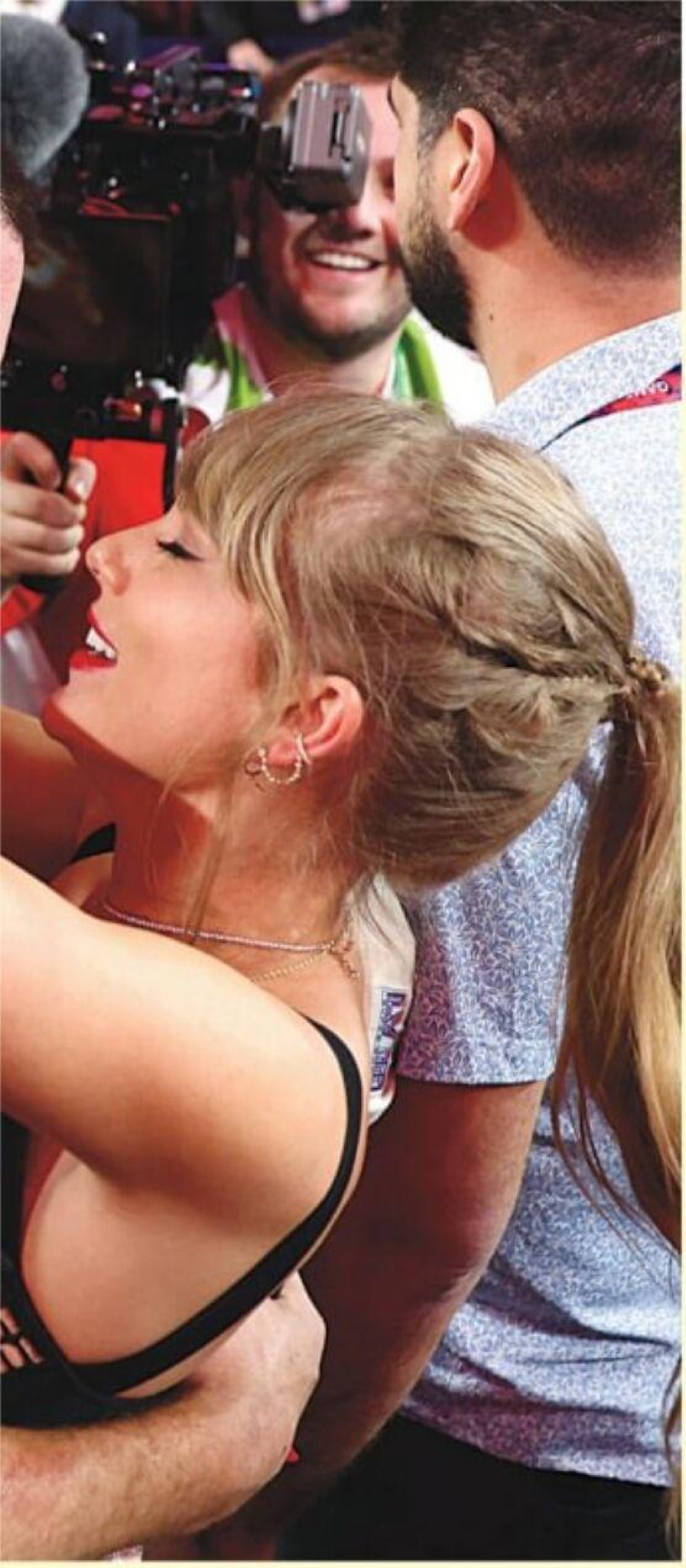
TOP: RYAN KANG/GETTY IMAGES. BOTTOM: GETTY IMAGES

THE GIRLFRIEND OF an NFL player attended a game early in 2023. The girlfriend saw the Chiefs thrash the Bears 41–10 at Arrowhead Stadium. The boyfriend had a pretty good game—7 receptions for 69 yards and one TD. This was all neat and clean...until it was reported that the game was the most watched telecast of the week in the NFL and ranked first among women across all age demographics. Suddenly, a phenomenon was born.

Taylor Swift—a singer so popular that one in every 78 songs streamed in the U.S. last year was by her—had been dating Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce, a football megastar. It doesn't get much bigger.

"Having the 'Taylor Swift Effect' is a positive," NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said in February at his pre–Super Bowl press conference. "It creates another group of young fans...interested in seeing why is she interested in this game? Besides Travis, she is a football fan, and that's great for us."

It's a fascinating understatement—and the growth should only get bigger in 2024. "We're a celebrity-driven country, and here's one of the biggest celebrities in the world at these games," says NFL Network analyst Brian Baldinger. "If this was in New York, it might be a little bit different. But Kansas City is in the middle of the country. They don't get anything like that. Seemed like a good place to put Taylor Swift."



NFL, SWIFT: IT'S A LOVE STORY The artist watched the Chiefs play while sitting alongside Travis Kelce's family. In 2023, NFL ratings saw an increase among teen girls, women 18–24 and women 35 and older.

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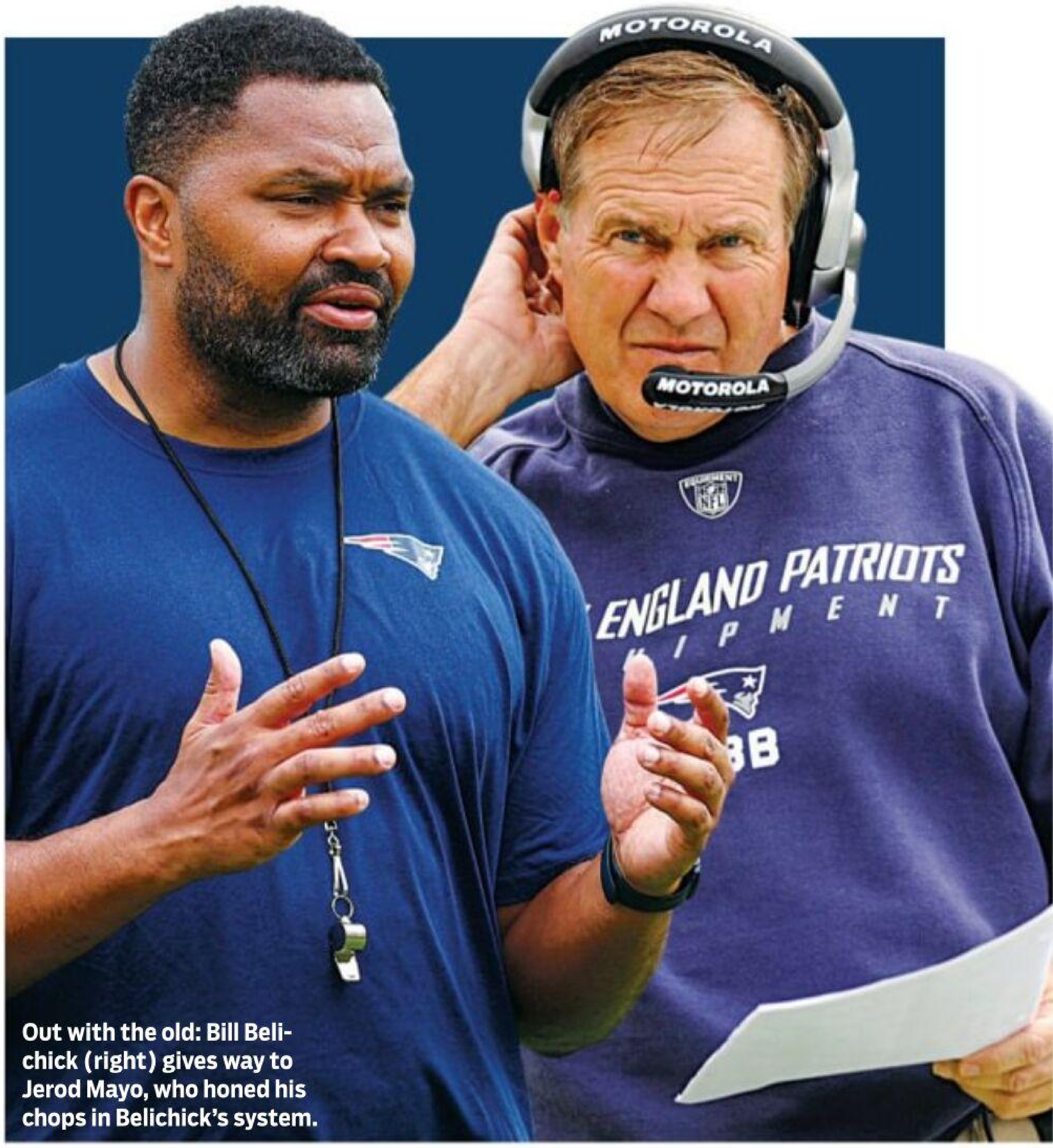


Out with the old: Bill Belichick (right) gives way to Jerod Mayo, who honed his chops in Belichick's system.

5 PATRIOTS REBUILD

THERE WAS A Y2K scare. A strange but amazing animated series called *SpongeBob SquarePants* premiered on Nickelodeon. A 23-year-old Tiger Woods won his first PGA Championship, and Brandi Chastain ripped off her jersey, revealing her sports bra, after scoring the winning goal for the U.S. in the FIFA Women's World Cup.

The year was 1999—the last time the New England Patriots took the field with someone other than Bill Belichick as their head coach.

All Belichick did in his 24 years in Foxborough was direct the Patriots to nine Super Bowls, winning six. Debate all you want if he or Tom Brady deserves the lion's share of the credit for this true American sports dynasty. Belichick will be a first-ballot Hall of Famer, and his place in NFL history is secure.

But nothing lasts forever. After bottoming out at 4–13 in 2023, Belichick is out and Jerod Mayo takes the reins from one of the most successful coaches in history.

Mayo, 38, has never been a head coach and is a fresh face replacing the 72-year-old Belichick. But he's a Belichick guy, having worked as an inside linebacker coach on the man's staff since 2019.

It is indeed a new era. Finding a quarterback to fill Brady's shoes the past four years proved to be mission impossible in New England, and Drake Maye is now next in line. Maye and Mayo must breathe life into a listless offense that ranked 30th in 2023 in total yards, 26th in total rushing yards, 28th in total passing yards and tied for last in scoring. Alex Van Pelt is the new offensive coordinator, arriving from the Cleveland Browns.

"The whole thing is going to be different," NFL Network analyst Brian Baldinger said. "How [Mayo] interacts with the media, how people go and watch practice—everybody is going to feel like there's oxygen in the room to breathe. It's going to be a good change."

PLAYERS FOR A LEAC

From the play to the pay, fantasy football may be the biggest driver of football fandom. Here are some top picks to keep in mind come draft day.

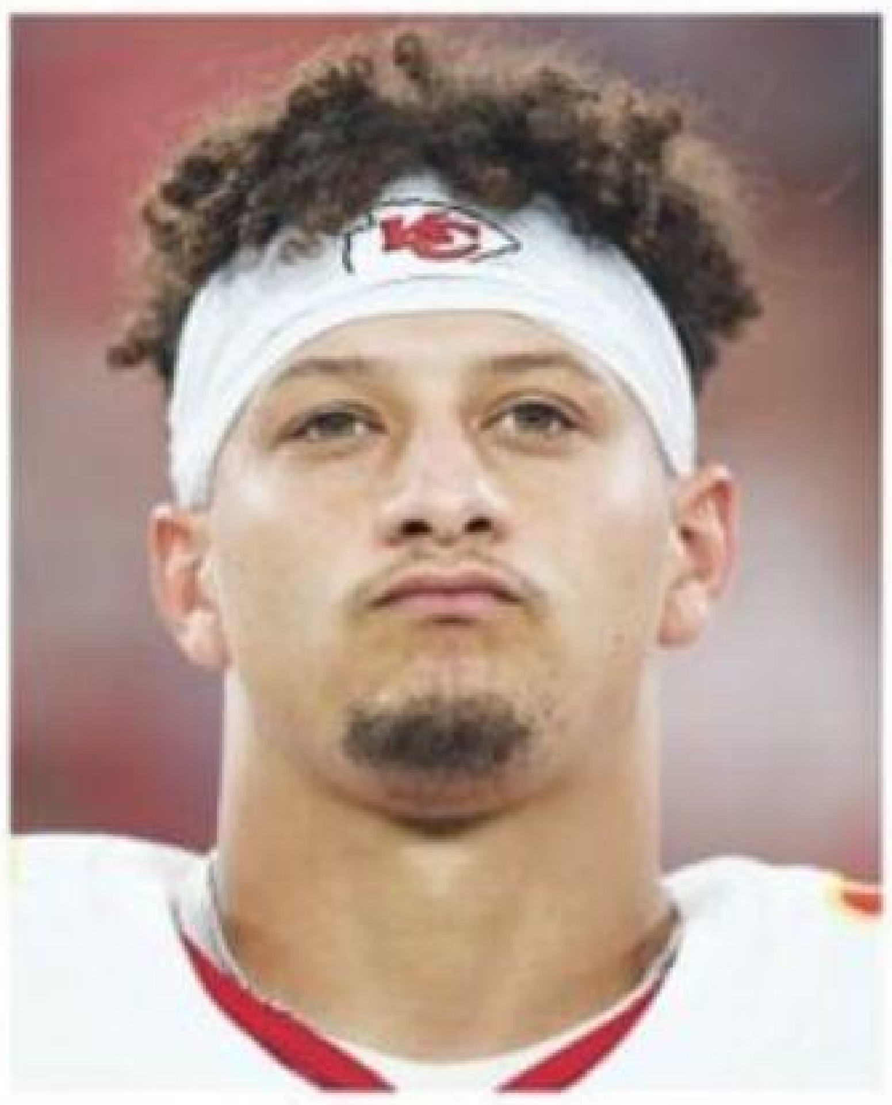
BY **ROBERT EDELSTEIN AND BILLY PIERCE**

Fantasy football needs no introduction. For several decades, the sense of camaraderie and competition you get from playing the game with work or friend groups has lured millions of fans, many of whom have gone on to root for the actual games themselves. As in all sports, every fan is an expert, but once television got more involved over the last 20 years—fantasy football shows now air on ESPN, Peacock and NFL Network—the challenge of picking your own lineup of players and beating your pals became a national obsession. With the 2024 season approaching, the annual drive to select the locks and search out the best sleepers before your friends do is upon us. We're banking on these names.

LOCKS

BREECE HALL
JETS RB

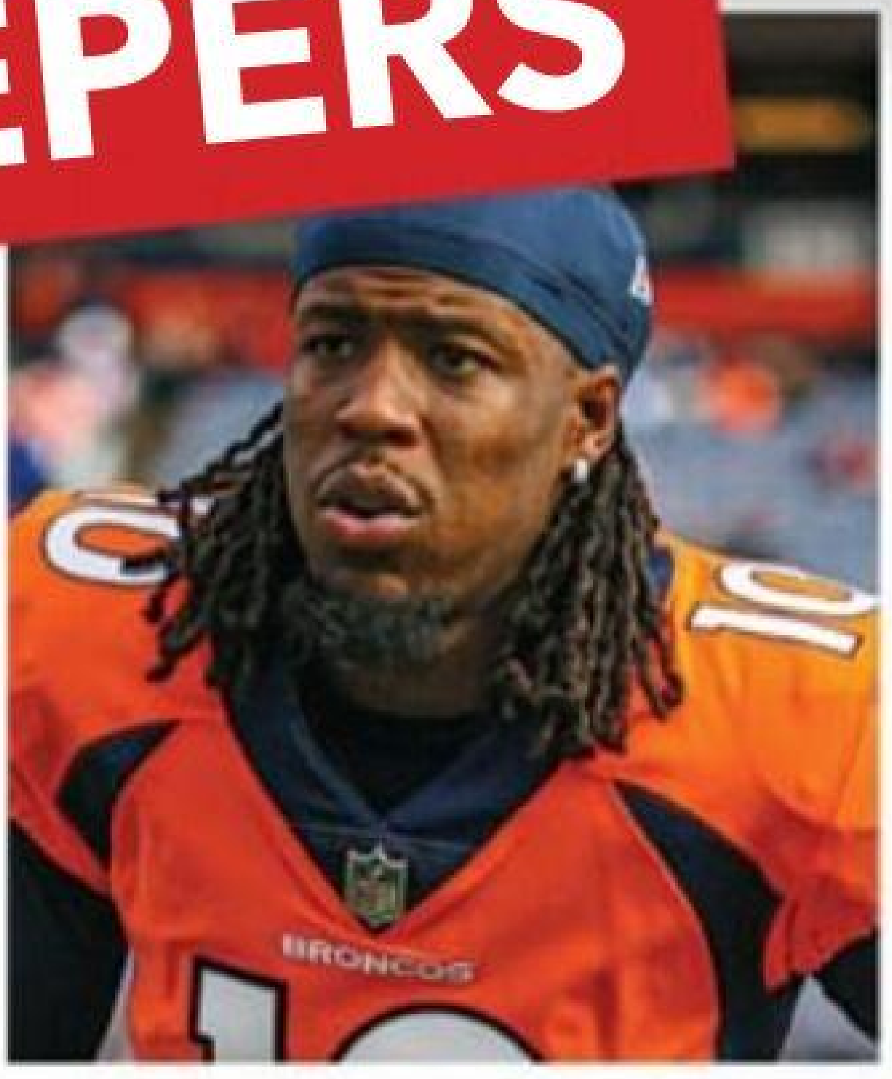
Legendary Fox Sports play-by-play man Kenny Albert is a fan of Hall, "who finished with just under 1,000 yards on the ground last year," he says, noting that he thrived in an offense where "teams were able to load up defensively because of the Aaron Rodgers injury." With a healthy Rodgers, that should open up the run game more, giving Hall a great chance to thrive.



PATRICK MAHOMES
CHIEFS QB

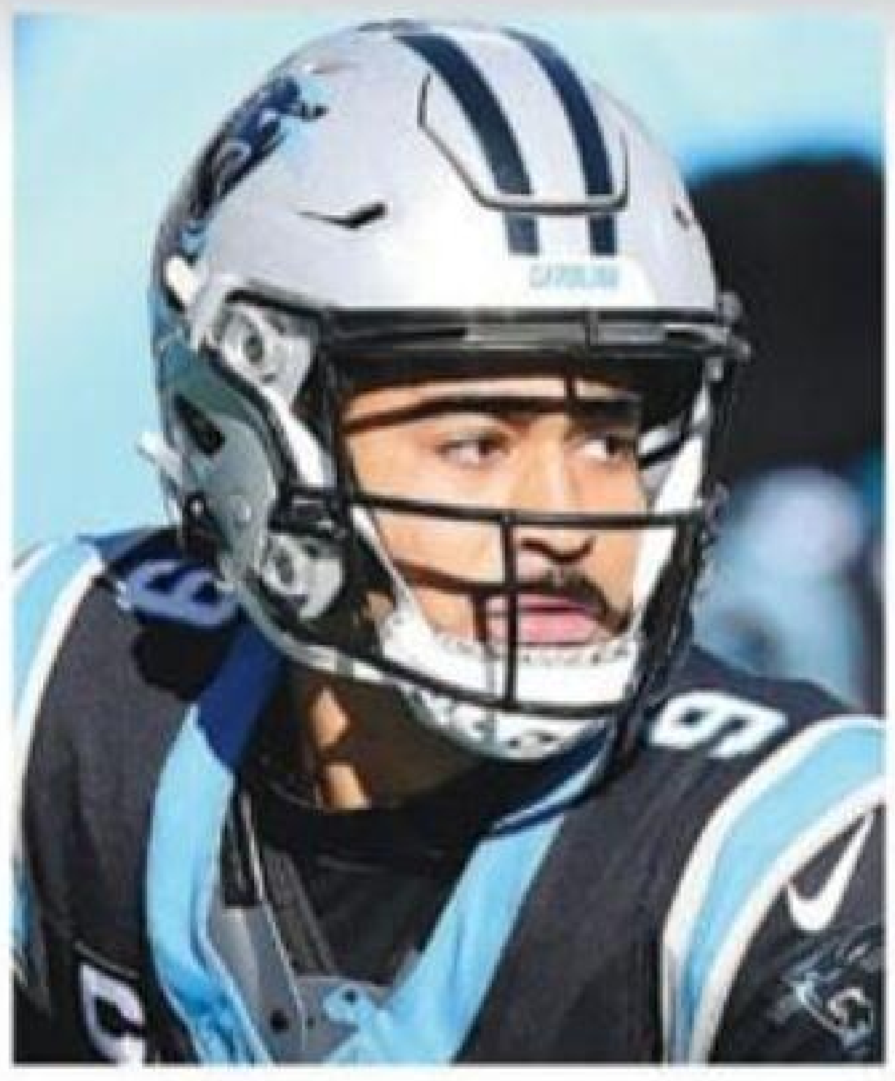
You're faced with a choice between top QBs Lamar Jackson, Josh Allen and Mahomes. Which to pick? "You can't go wrong with Mahomes," Albert says, noting that over the past six years he's grown into a "generational talent. He's on target to potentially be one of the best of all time—and he's only 28 years old." Plus, he's going for three-straight titles.

SLEEPERS



JERRY JEUDY
BROWNS WR

Jeudy was a disappointment with the Broncos; he had too much talent to be underperforming. Blame some of that on inconsistency at QB—even with Russell Wilson there the last two seasons. But going to Cleveland puts Jeudy alongside weapons such as WR Amari Cooper and TE David Njoku. He could stand out as QB Deshaun Watson's downfield threat.



BRYCE YOUNG
PANTHERS QB

"Given the offseason moves the Panthers made, I see him having a better season," Albert says. "We had a number of meetings with [him last season], and I was very impressed with his work ethic and football IQ. Obviously they had a tough year, but they have an entirely new staff." Presumably, things can only improve.

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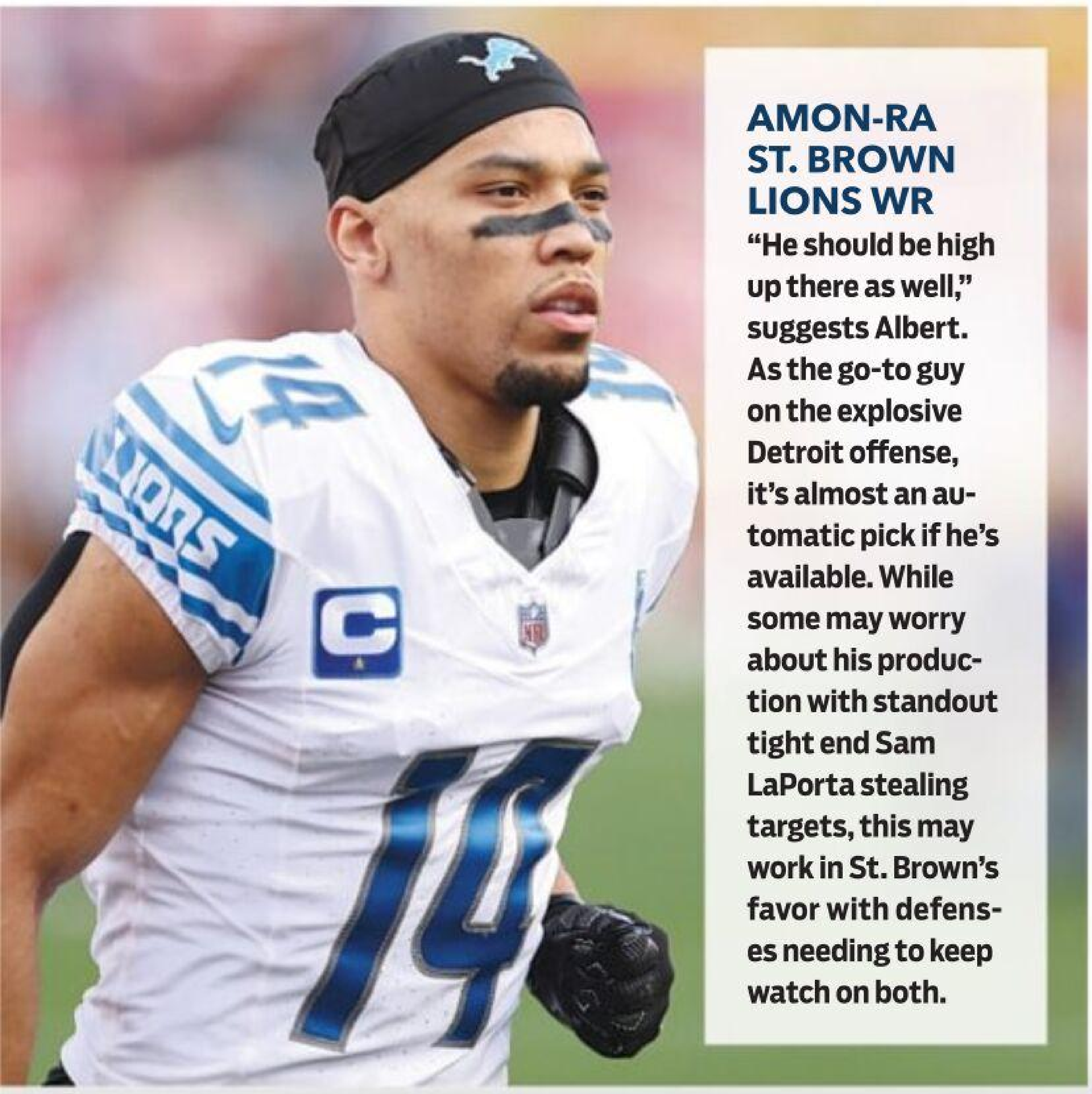
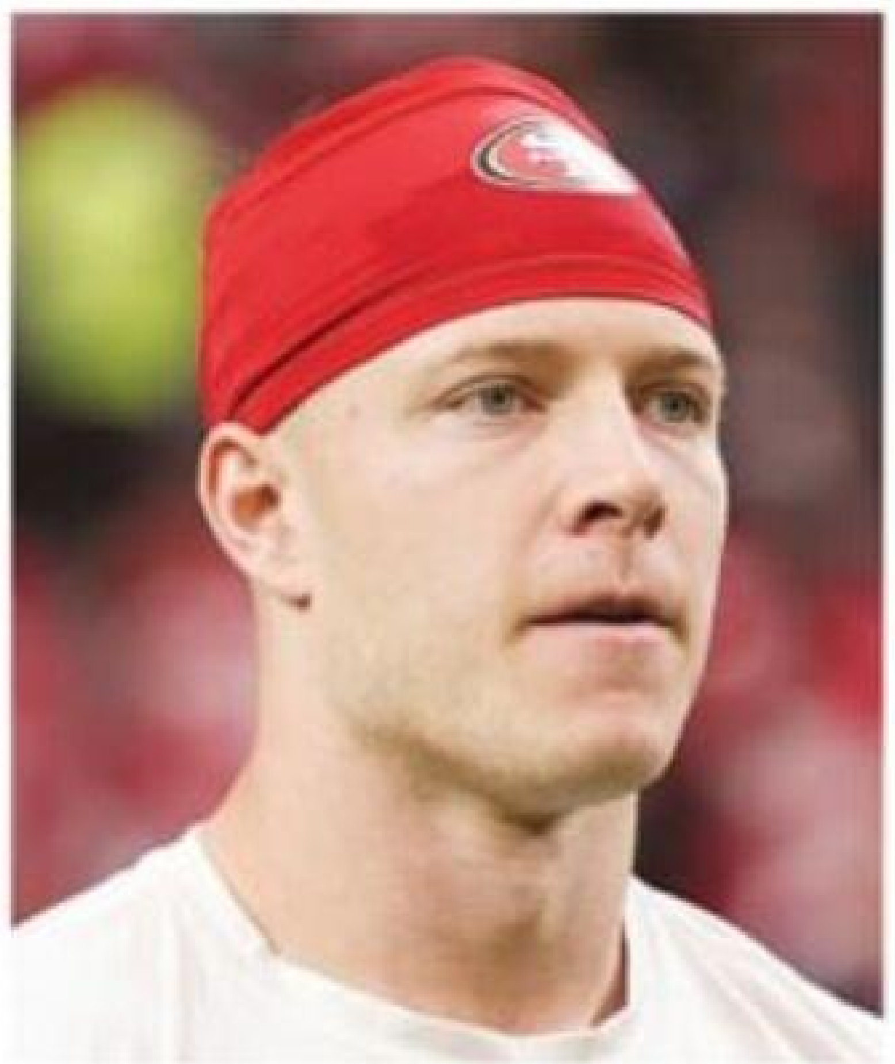


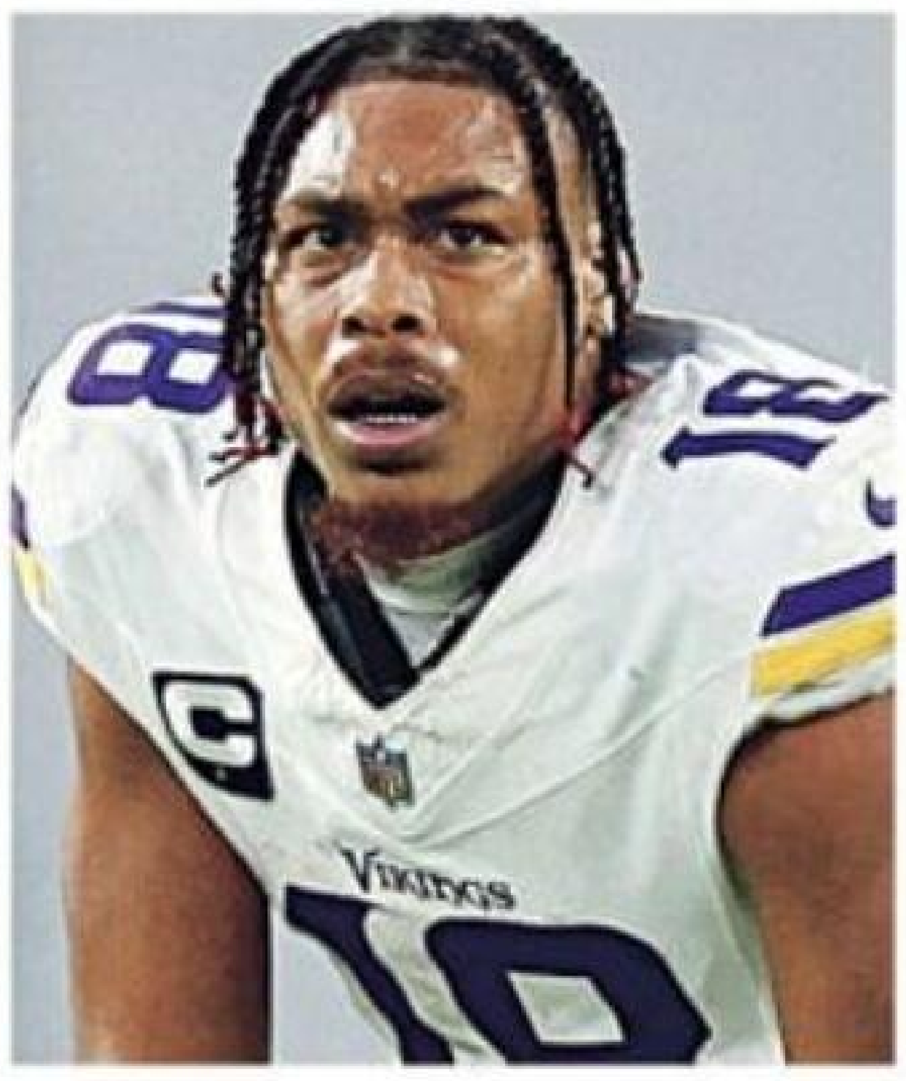
AMON-RA ST. BROWN LIONS WR

"He should be high up there as well," suggests Albert. As the go-to guy on the explosive Detroit offense, it's almost an automatic pick if he's available. While some may worry about his production with standout tight end Sam LaPorta stealing targets, this may work in St. Brown's favor with defenses needing to keep watch on both.



CHRISTIAN MCCAFFREY 49ERS RB

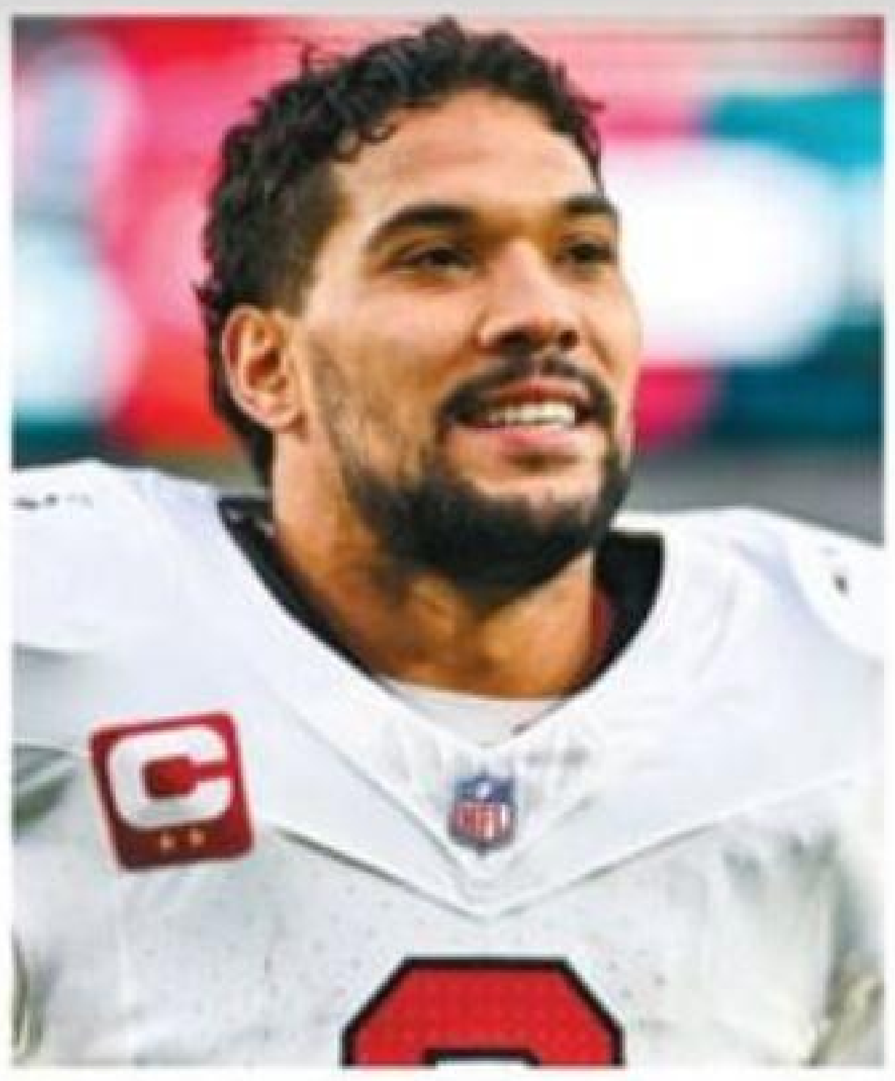
The extraordinary running back "has to be at the top of the list," says Albert, noting that McCaffrey is "one of the best in history. There are not too many guys—you can count them on one hand—[that give you] 1,000 yards rushing and 100 receptions in one season." With the 49ers really yearning for that Super Bowl win, McCaffrey may be even better.



JUSTIN JEFFERSON VIKINGS WR

"It's certainly a golden era at the wide receiver position," Albert says. But he likes Jefferson a ton, and he'll be playing with a huge new contract from Minnesota. "That stretch he's put together in a few seasons is up there with anybody else we've seen. Also, Jefferson played only 10 games last season and had 1,000 yards!"

GUE OF YOUR OWN

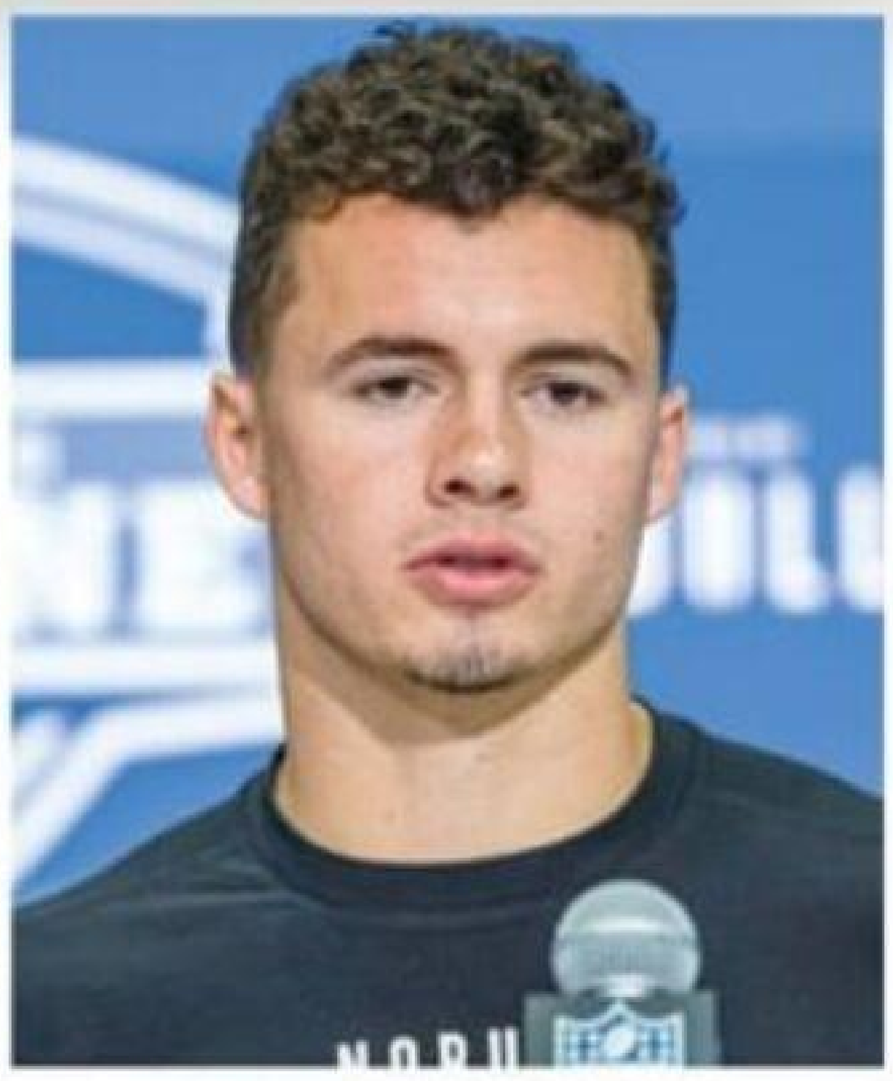


JAMES CONNER CARDINALS RB

His numbers weren't bad last season, although it's important to note that he only played 13 games and scored a personal-best 1,040 rushing yards. In 2024, his eighth season, expect him to be the main goal line threat for Arizona and a solid pick if he can stay healthy, producing in both the run and passing games.

ANTHONY RICHARDSON COLTS QB

"I would throw him in as a sleeper," says Albert, noting that Richardson got hurt early in the season, but adding, "I was very impressed by what I saw from him in both arm strength and with his legs with the Colts." A healthy Richardson could certainly surpass his potential in 2024.

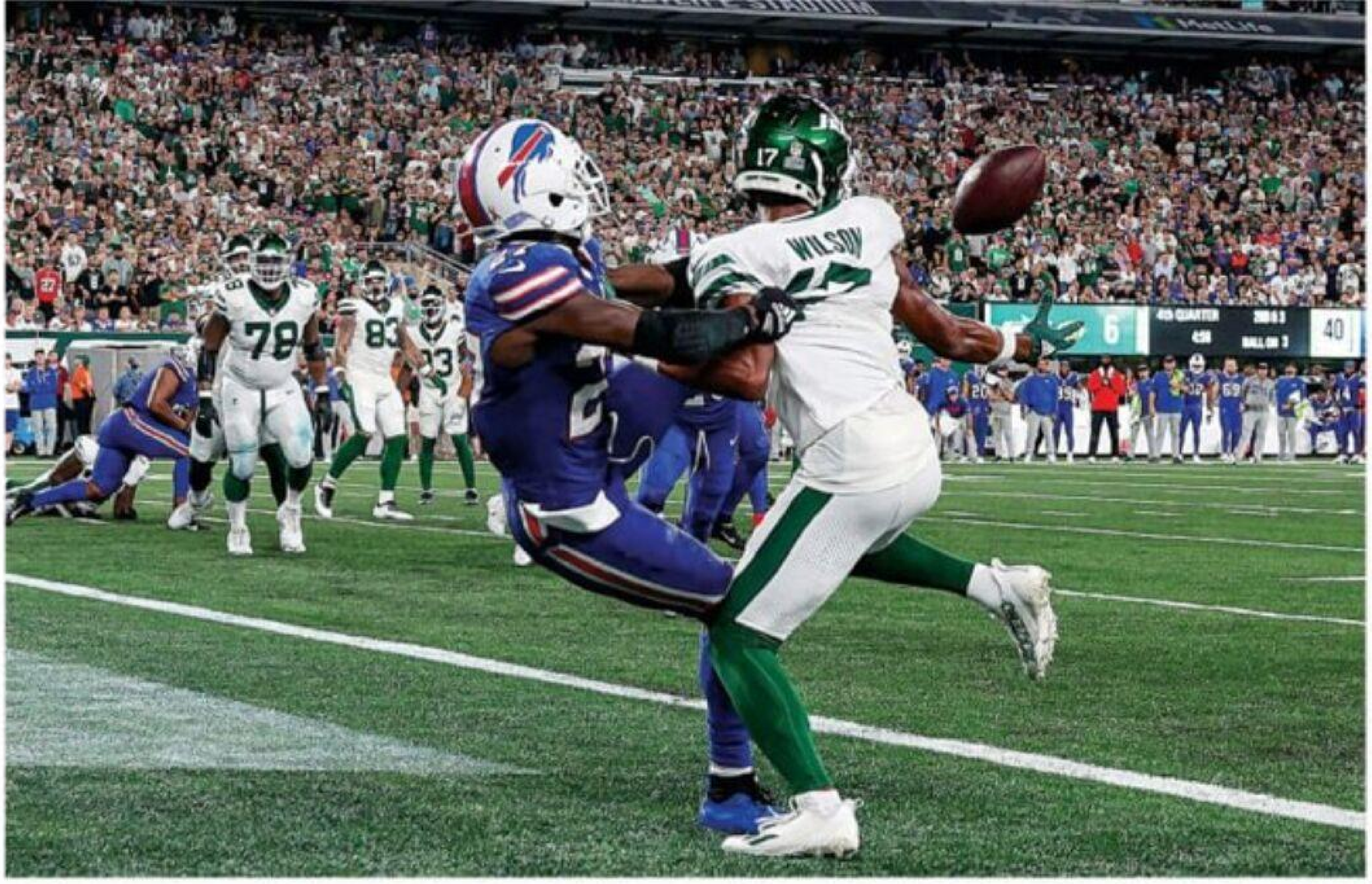


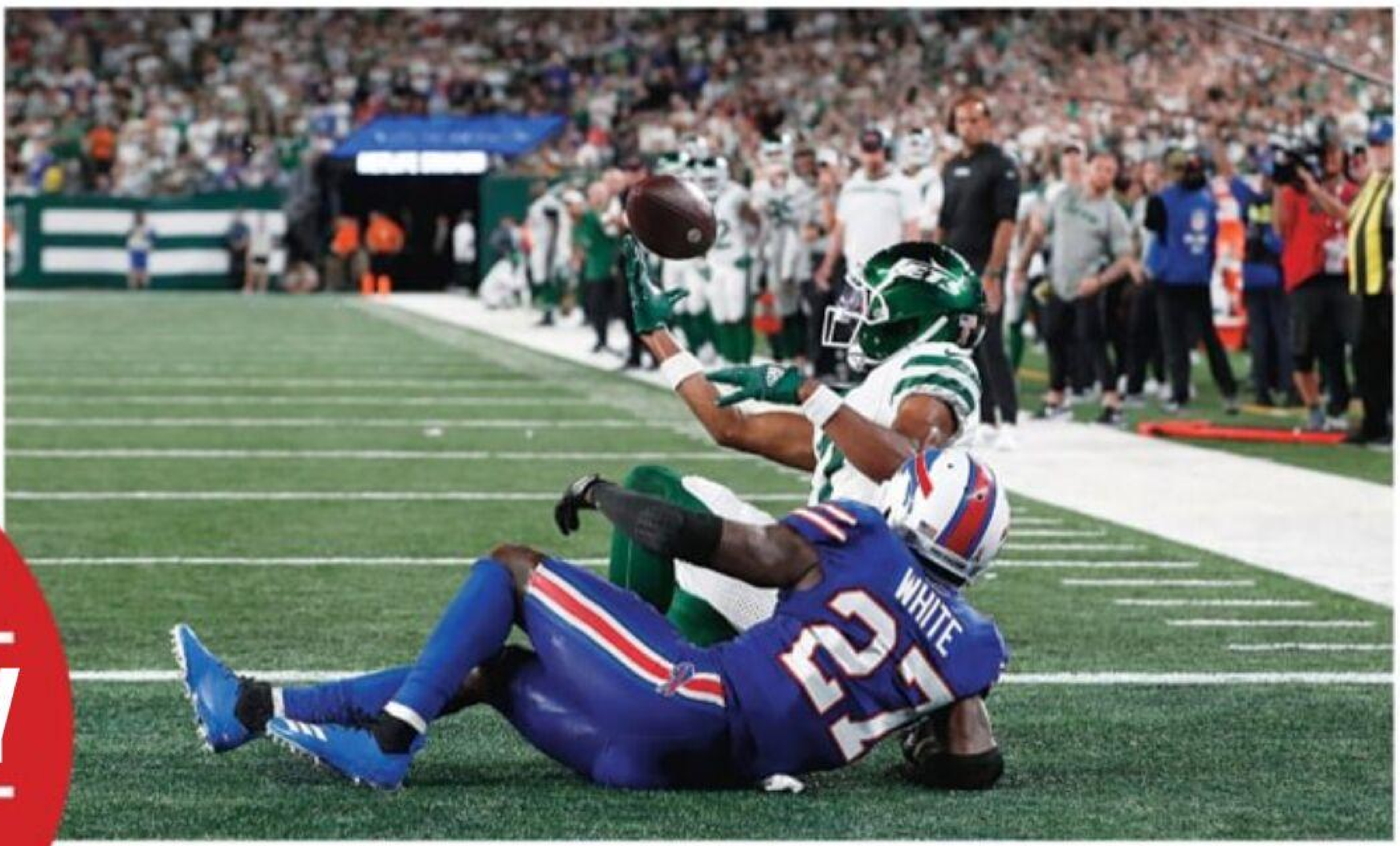
LADD MCCONKEY CHARGERS WR

Looking for a rookie sleeper? McConkey, taken 34th, in Round 2 from Georgia, comes off a great college career and an excellent NFL Combine. With the Chargers, he'll be targeted by a top QB in Justin Herbert. The rookie will certainly make an impact with WR Keenan Allen having just left to go to the Bears.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES; PERRY KNOTTS/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID BERDING/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL HICKEY/GETTY IMAGES; JUSTIN CASTERLINE/GETTY IMAGES; KYLE ROSS/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES

The 2023 season was packed with spectacular moments. Here are some of the best, many of which turned the tide for top teams.



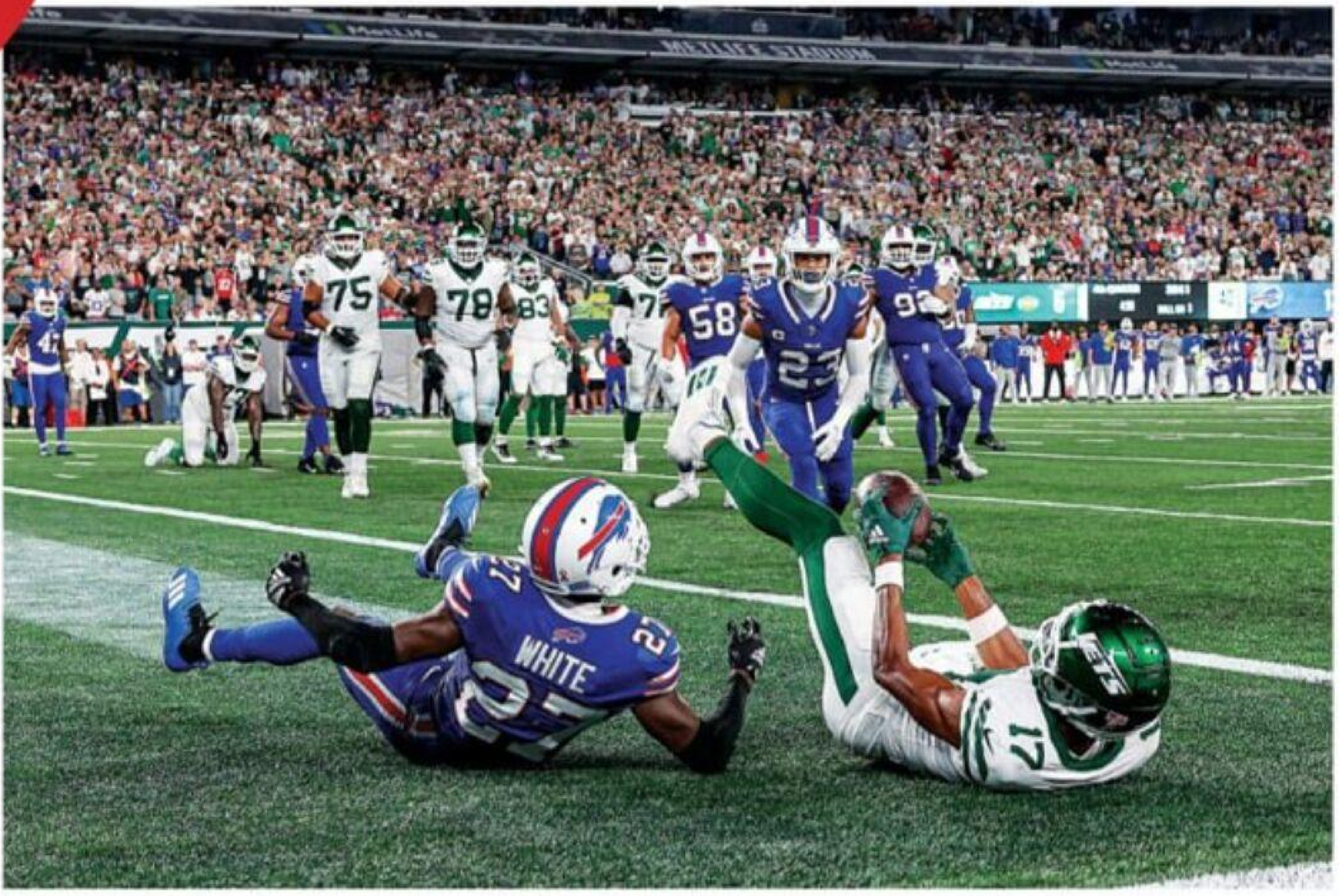


SEPT. 11, 2023
METLIFE STADIUM,
NEW JERSEY

POWER PLAY

BUFFALO BILLS VS. NEW YORK JETS

LOSING QUARTERBACK AARON Rodgers on the fourth snap was heartbreaking, but the hometown New York Jets still snatched a first-game win in OT, in part thanks to this circus-like fourth-quarter touchdown catch from Garrett Wilson (17), despite strong coverage from Bills cornerback Tre'Davious White (27). Wilson tipped and batted the Zach Wilson–thrown ball while falling, before reeling it in on his back in the end zone. The Jets later won on a 65-yard punt return TD by rookie wide receiver Xavier Gipson.



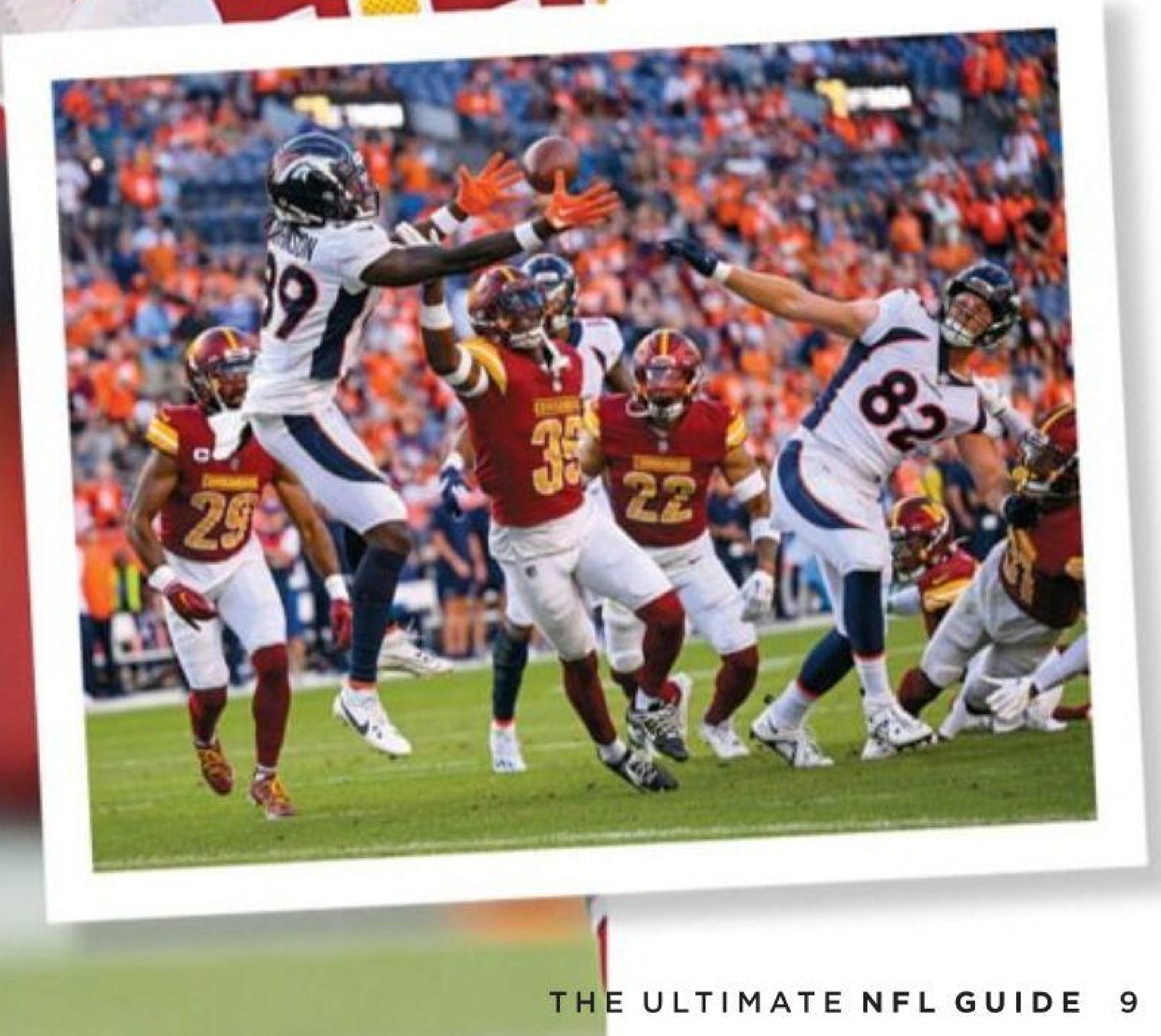
FROM TOP: ELSA/GETTY IMAGES; JIM MCISAAC/GETTY IMAGES; ELSA/GETTY IMAGES

SEPT. 17, 2023
EMPOWER FIELD AT
MILE HIGH, COLORADO

POWER PLAY

WASHINGTON COMMANDERS VS. DENVER BRONCOS

IN SPITE OF high expectations going into the season, the 0–1 Denver Broncos were down by 8 to the Commanders (who had stormed back from 18 points down) with 3 seconds to go in Game 2 of the year. From midfield, QB Russell Wilson rolled and then heaved a Hail Mary pass, which bounced off a couple of other players before wide receiver Brandon Johnson (89) caught it for a touchdown. The 2-point conversion that followed failed, and Washington won 35–33, but the catch's power remains.



LEFT: RYAN KANG/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: JOHN MCDONNELL/THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

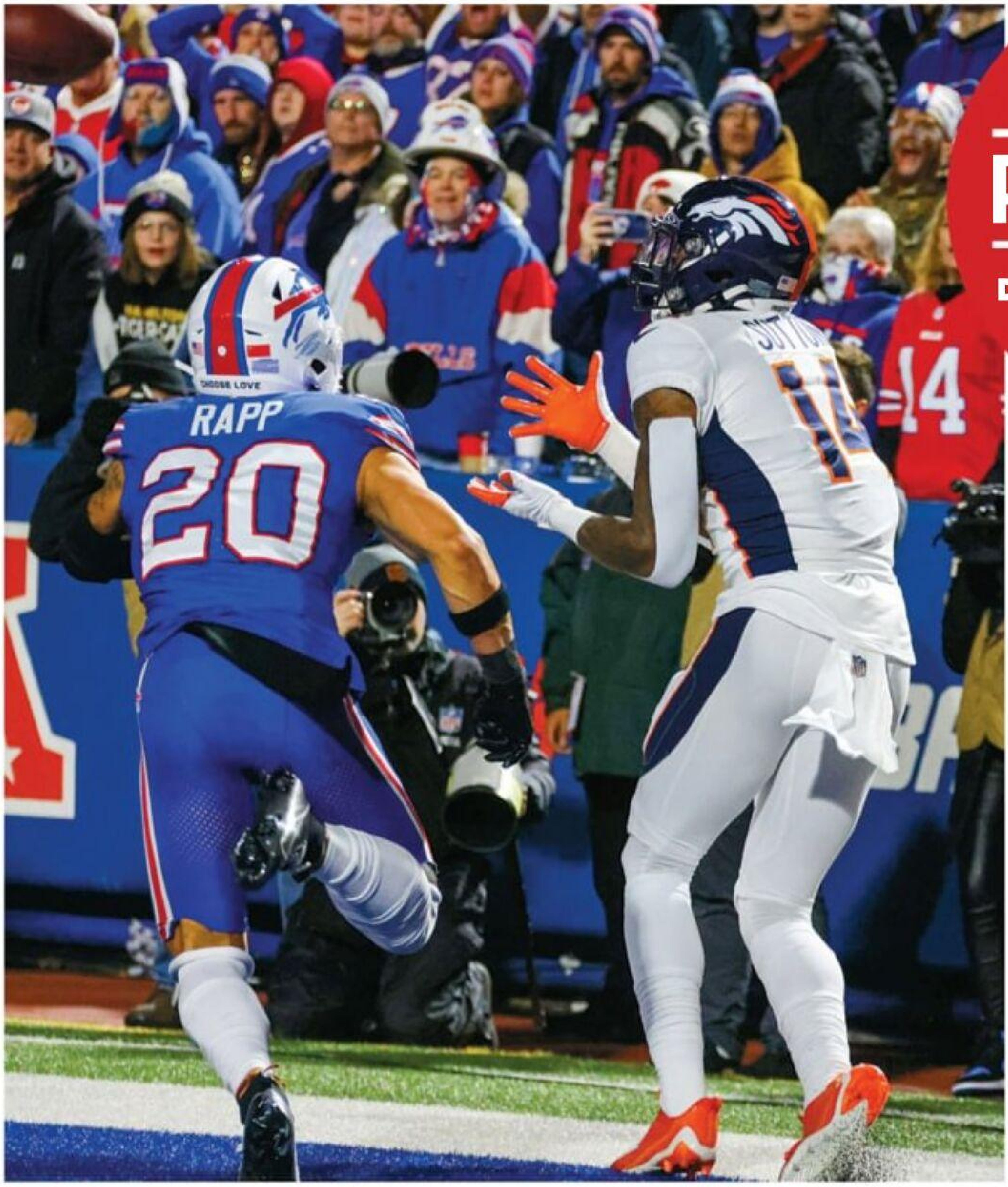
YLAND LOTTERY
BROWN
11
RBES JR
13

OCT. 29, 2023
FEDEXFIELD, MARYLAND

POWER PLAY

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES VS. WASHINGTON COMMANDERS

THE 38–31 VICTORY that saw the Eagles take their record to 7–1 had some scares, including star quarterback Jalen Hurts nursing a tender knee. But there was only glee when Hurts connected at the end of the second quarter with wide receiver A.J. Brown (11), who manhandled a one-handed touchdown over cornerback Benjamin St-Juste (25) on the way to becoming the first NFL player to amass 125-plus receiving yards in six straight games. "I literally just did that in practice on Friday," Brown later said of his handy grab.

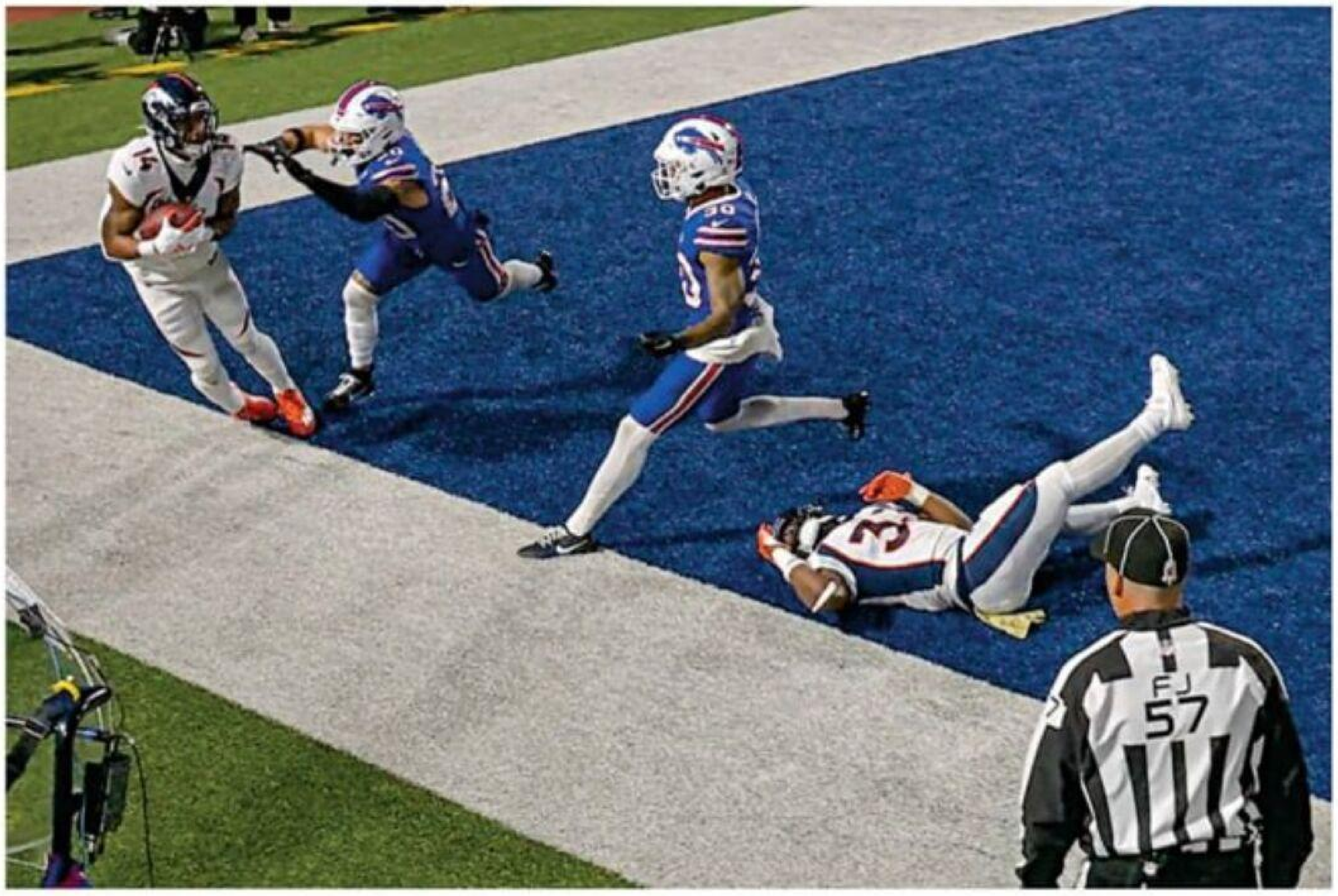


NOV. 13, 2023
HIGHMARK STADIUM,
NEW YORK

POWER PLAY

DENVER BRONCOS VS. BUFFALO BILLS

THE DENVER BRONCOS started the year 1–5, then reeled off five straight wins in 2023. Few plays represented their turn in fortune better than Courtland Sutton's (14) touchdown catch in the team's Week 10 win (24–22) over the Bills. Midway through the second quarter, on fourth-and-2, Broncos QB Russell Wilson rolled out, then spun backward before firing to Sutton, who *just* managed to keep both feet in bounds past Bills safety Taylor Rapp (20). Initially called incomplete, the play was overturned on review.



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JAN. 20, 2024
LEVI'S STADIUM,
CALIFORNIA

POWER PLAY

GREEN BAY PACKERS VS. SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

THEY CALL HIM "Big Play Dre," and nothing explains it better than Dre Greenlaw's interception that sent the San Francisco 49ers into the NFC Championship Game. The Niners struggled throughout, with defense carrying the load. Greenlaw (57) dove for and snagged Green Bay QB Jordan Love's off-balance throw with 46 seconds left...then got up and started running instead of taking a knee to protect the 24–21 win. "I wanted to run on the field and tackle him myself," 49ers smiling coach Kyle Shanahan said after the win.

MICHAEL ZAGARIS/SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS/GETTY IMAGES

TOP: GREGORY SHAMUS/GETTY IMAGES. BOTTOM: NIC ANTAYA/GETTY IMAGES

JAN. 21, 2024
FORD FIELD, MICHIGAN

POWER PLAY

TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS VS. DETROIT LIONS

TAMPA BAY'S MIKE Evans (13) had a field day in this divisional round playoff game, even though it was in a 31–23 losing effort for the team. Evans tallied eight receptions for 147 yards in the game, including two typically eye-popping catches. First, a 29-yard-plus kneeling grab at the 1-yard line near the end of the first half; later, with 4:37 to go and the Bucs down by two touchdowns, Evans rose over Cam Sutton (1) for an outstanding TD before throwing the ball into the stands.

CAMPBELL
46
15

JAN. 28, 2024
LEVI'S STADIUM,
CALIFORNIA

POWER PLAY

DETROIT LIONS VS. SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

JAUAN JENNINGS HAULED in only one pass for 8 yards in the 49ers' 34–31 NFC Championship victory over the Lions, but it was an amazing grab at the perfect time. With the Niners down by 17 points early in the third, quarterback Brock Purdy scrambled on a crucial third-and-4 play and floated a short pass that Jennings (15) leaped for and caught one-handed over linebacker Jack Campbell to keep the drive alive. Brandon Aiyuk's 51-yard catch, which caromed off cornerback Kindle Vildor, was another highlight.

THIS PAGE: EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES (3). OPPOSITE PAGE: MARK J. TERRILL/AP PHOTO

FEB. 11, 2024
ALLEGIANT STADIUM,
NEVADA

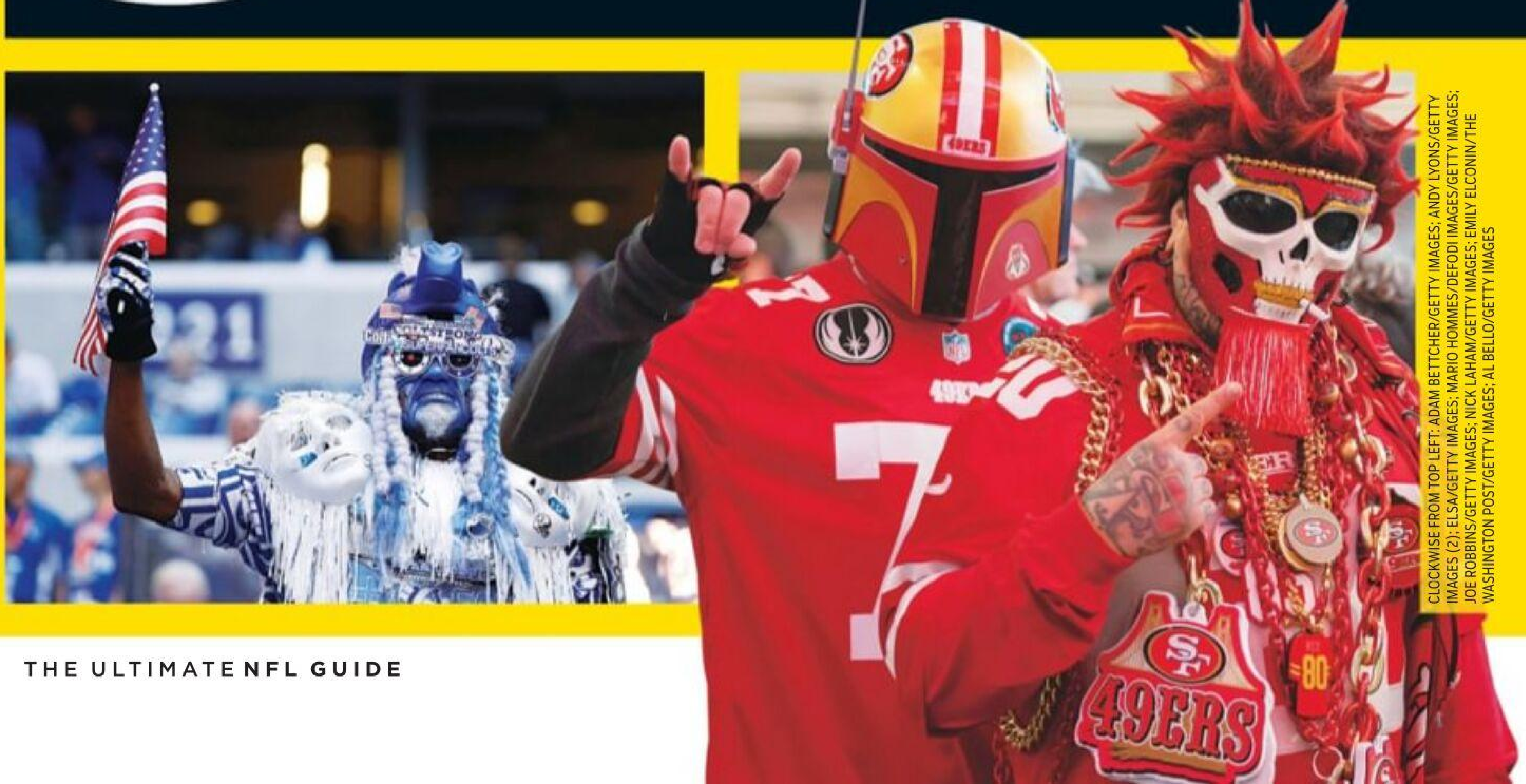
POWER PLAY

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS VS. KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

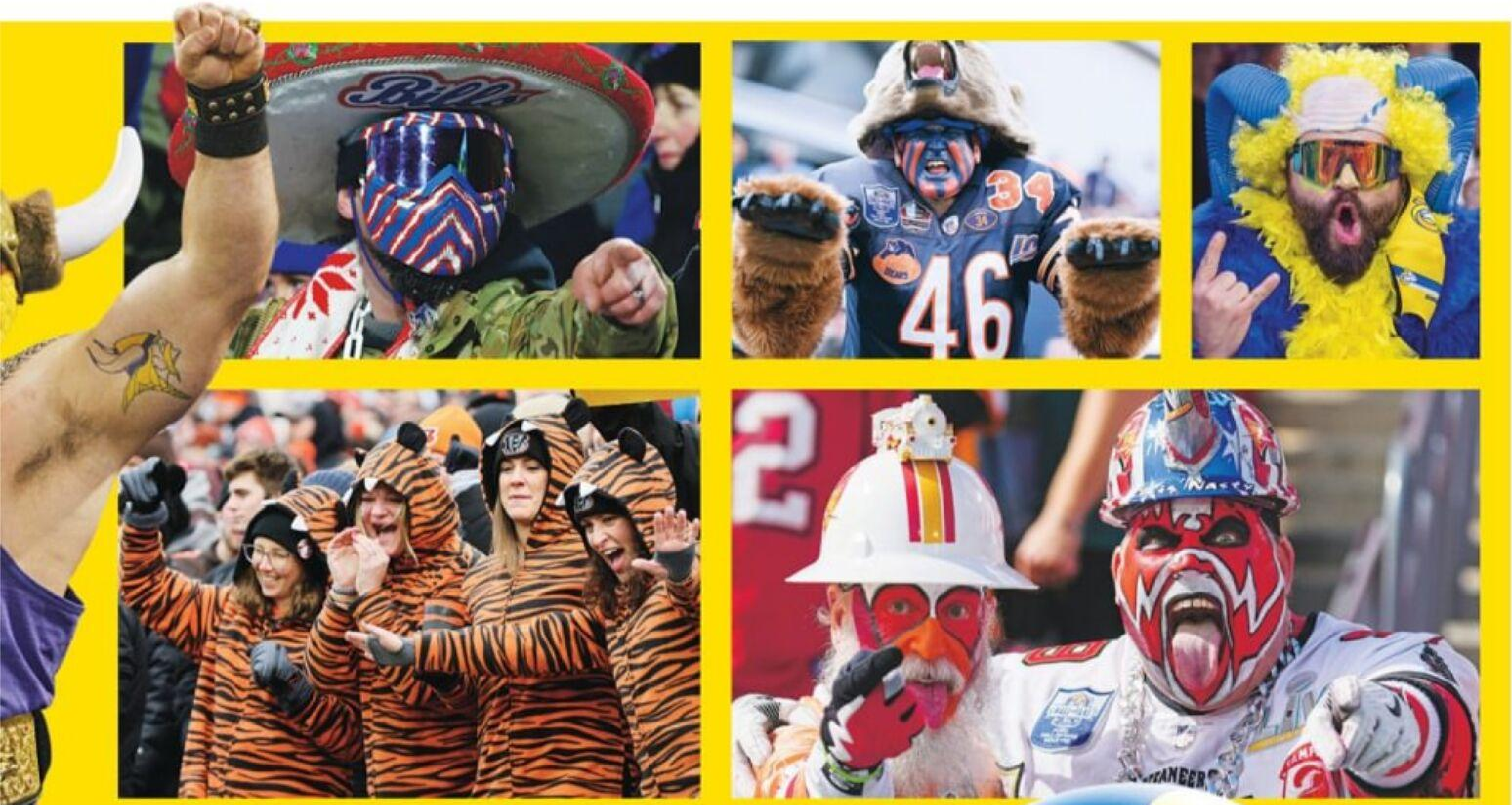
IT WAS A moment forever etched in pro football history. In a sense, this simple play was more a whimper than a bang, coming after a host of exciting plays that sent the NFL's annual title game into overtime. But the longest-ever Super Bowl ended with a quick rollout by the game's MVP, quarterback Patrick Mahomes (15), and a nearly sidearm flip to wide receiver Mecole Hardman (12), who scampered into the end zone to seal the 25–22 win before leaping into Mahomes' arms as dejected 49ers players walked off.

SUPER

Face paint! Body paint! Head-to-toe costumes! These devoted football followers take their love of the game (and obsessive admiration for their teams) to the highest level possible, often earning a jumbotron close-up in the process.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ADAM BETTCHER/GETTY IMAGES; ANDY LYONS/GETTY IMAGES (2); ELSA/GETTY IMAGES; MARIO HOMMES/DEFODI IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES; JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES; NICK LAHAM/GETTY IMAGES; EMILY ELCONIN/THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES; AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES



FANS

LIONS
TUBGATERS
LAMBEAU FIELD
SUNDAY NIGHT
RAMS
ANTI-BULLYING
SUPERCOWBOY
MOB SQUAD BOOSTER CLUB

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: TIMOTHY T LUDWIG/GETTY IMAGES; QUINN HARRIS/GETTY IMAGES; ALLEN J. SCHABEN/LOS ANGELES TIMES/GETTY IMAGES; ANDY LEWIS/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES; KAELIN MENDEZ/GETTY IMAGES; QUINN HARRIS/GETTY IMAGES; EMILY ELCONIN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES; ANDY LYONS/GETTY IMAGES

LVIII
SUPER BOWL
JONES

OUR PREDICTION: MORE RED REIGN

BY **IAN SPELLING**

IN THAT LAST, breathless moment, Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes rolled right and lofted a simple short pass to wide-open wide receiver Mecole Hardman, who waltzed into the end zone for the winning touchdown. That catch and pass in overtime—against the San Francisco 49ers on February 11, 2024—gave the Chiefs a 25–22 victory in Super Bowl LVIII. Hardman, so in the moment, didn't even realize the importance of the catch; Mahomes had to tell him. "I blacked out," the receiver later admitted.

Hardman likely did not connect several other impressive dots. The Chiefs lifted the coveted Lombardi Trophy that night for the second time in a row, and the third time in five years. Head coach Andy Reid, who arrived in 2013 after 14 seasons in Philadelphia, has taken the Chiefs to the playoffs every season since, with the exception of 2014. They've won the AFC West every season from 2016 to 2023 and have shown no signs of slowing down.

> **The Kansas City Chiefs have won three of the last five Super Bowls. Here's why experts say they're built to take another one.**

OUR CHIEF TAKEAWAY? KANSAS CITY IS THE LATEST NFL DYNASTY

Their run started in earnest when Mahomes (right)—chosen by the Chiefs with the 10th pick of the 2017 draft—took his first snap that year on December 31, leading the team to a 27–24 win against the Broncos. The next season, he threw for 5,097 yards and 50 TDs, receiving MVP honors. And he has stayed remarkably consistent and healthy, winning three Super Bowls and being named league MVP again in 2022, as well as MVP in Super Bowls LIV, LVII and LVIII.

The other most notable marquee name, of course, is tight end Travis Kelce. Though, by his lofty standards, he endured a down year in 2023, amassing fewer than 1,000 receiving yards for the first time since 2015, Kelce came up huge when it counted in the playoffs. And his high-profile romance with superstar entertainer Taylor Swift transformed millions of Swifties into KC fans.

NOW, LET'S EXAMINE THE OTHER DOTS

● Shrewd drafting, trades and free agent signings have nabbed them a who's who of All-Pros, Pro Bowlers and future Hall of Famers. The Chiefs picked linebacker Nick Bolton in the second round of the 2021 draft, and in 2024 wrangled Texas Longhorns wide receiver Xavier Worthy, who might evolve into another prodigious Mahomes target. Among the Chiefs' best trades in recent years: Ravens offensive lineman Orlando Brown Jr. in 2021. In terms

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JAMIE SQUIRE/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID EULITT/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL OWENS/GETTY IMAGES

VICTORY PARTY
Far left: Reid holds the Lombardi Trophy aloft; above: Kelce, had nine receptions for 93 yards

of free agent signings, for 2024 the Chiefs brought in Carson Wentz as Mahomes' backup, former Cardinals wide receiver Marquise Brown and punter Matt Araiza.

● Kudos to the team as well for parting ways with stars—even if it pains the Chiefs faithful—before they decline, cost too much or both. Starting QB Alex Smith was traded to make room for Mahomes; two-time Super Bowl champ Tommy Townsend will punt for the Texans this season; and Tyreek Hill, the supremely talented wide receiver, was traded to the Dolphins after the 2021 season.

● It all helps keep the Chiefs youthful, fresh, competitive, motivated and ascendant. Even Mahomes at long last buys into the dynasty talk. "It's the start of one," he told CBS sideline reporter Tracy Wolfson as confetti fell onto the field after the Chiefs' Super Bowl LVIII victory. "We've got a young team, and we're going to keep this thing going.... We're not done."

> “It's the start of [a dynasty]. We've got a young team and we're going to keep this thing going. We're not done.”
>
> **Patrick Mahomes**

EXPERT OPINION

Mike Tannenbaum—ESPN analyst and ex–Jets general manager—scouts the Chiefs' future

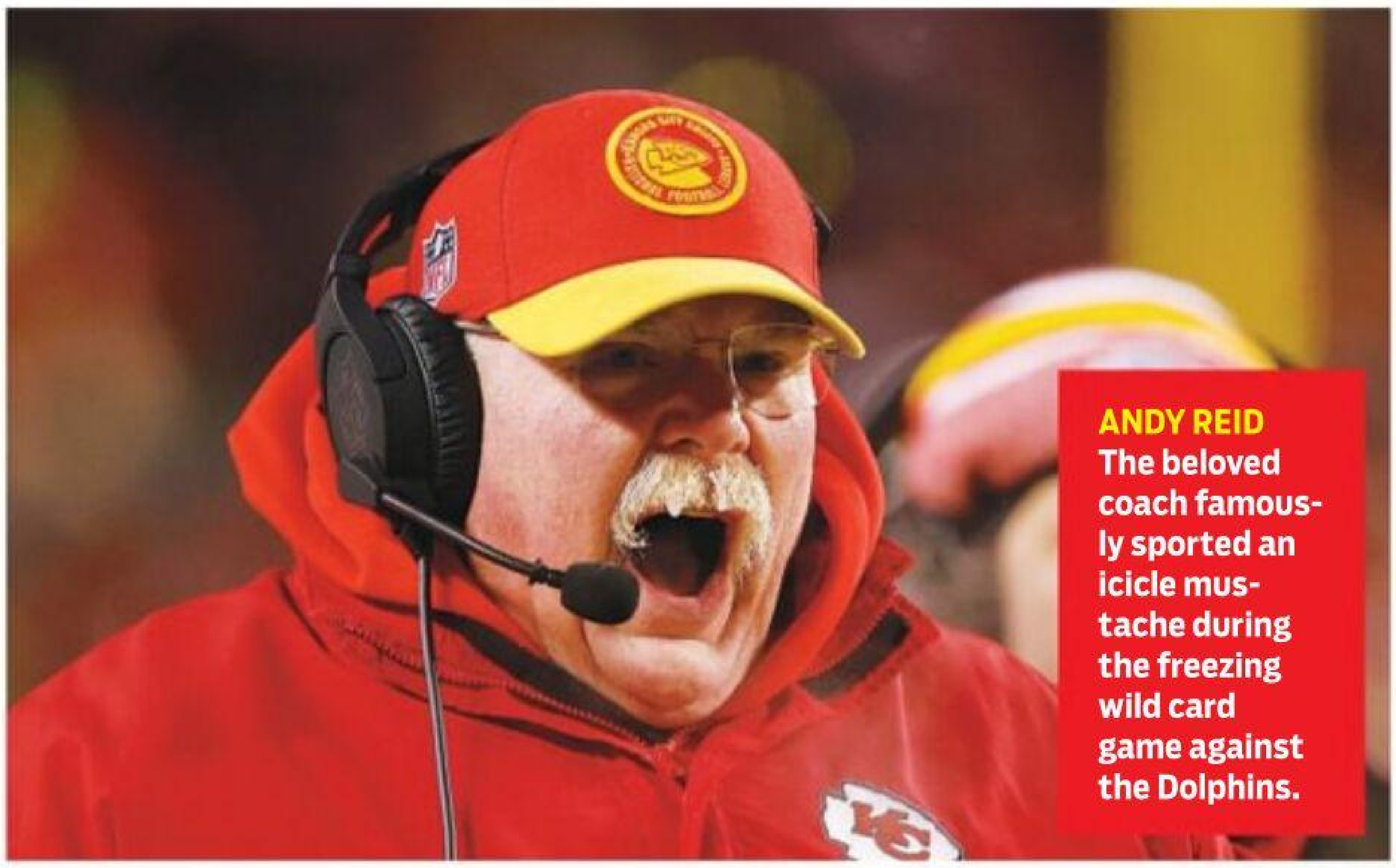
Who's going to win Super Bowl LIX? I'm going to say Kansas City.

Do you think they've got a dynasty there? I do. They're ahead of schedule because of their youth on defense, in particular. They've gone young in a number of spots, but because their defense is so young, that's why, to me, they have a chance to be dynastic.

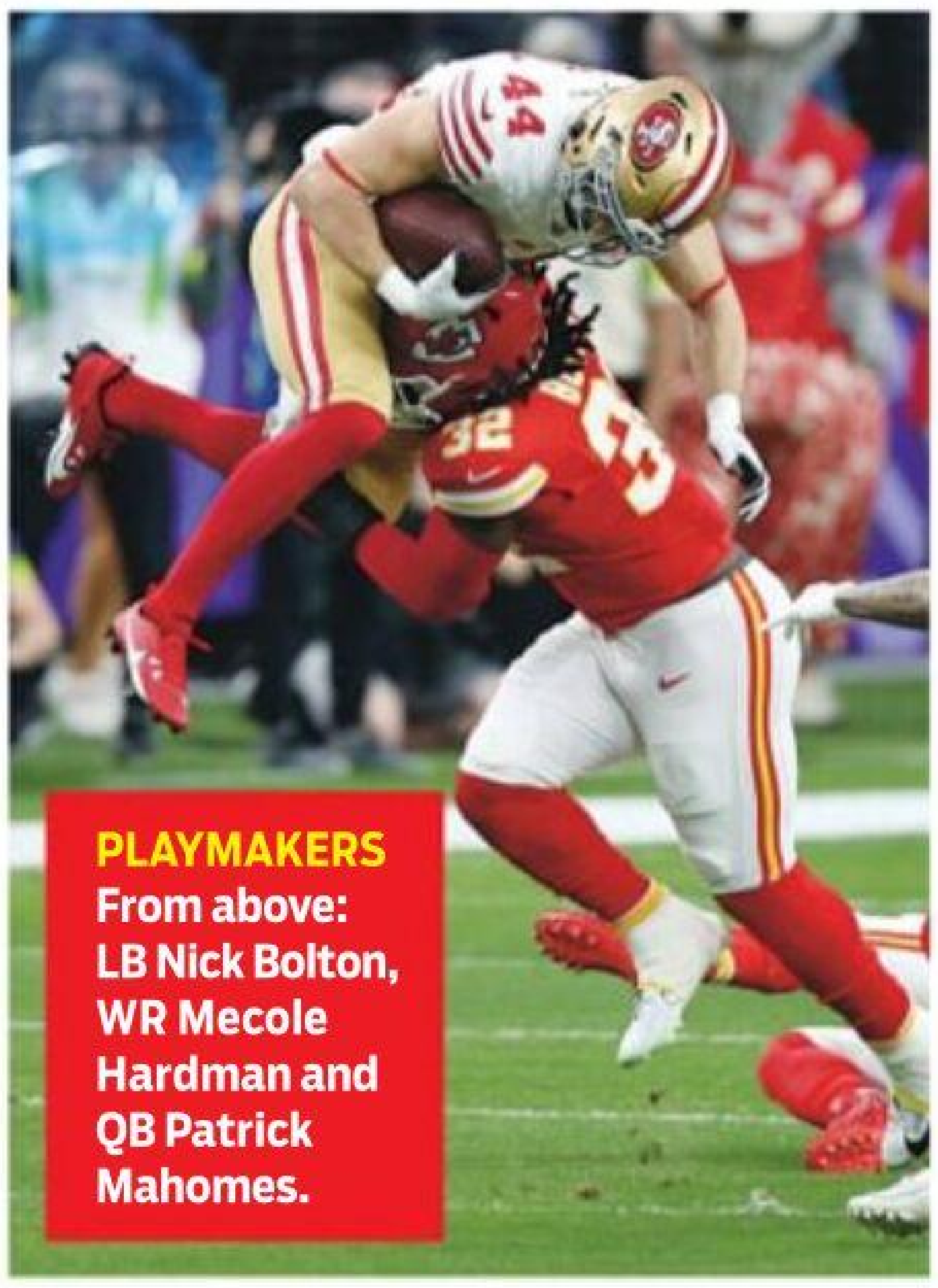
How important is Andy Reid in the equation? If he retires, do you think that ends things? No, because Steve Spagnuolo [former head coach of the Rams and the Giants] has done such a great job [as Chiefs defensive coordinator]. That gives him a good chance of sustainability. Again, you can pay [higher contracts for] certain positions in the system. You just can't pay them all. Andy Reid is hugely important, obviously, but Steve Spagnuolo is also.

What do the Chiefs need to do, or avoid, going forward to remain a dynasty? They have to continue to hit on draft choices. Their margin for error is extremely small. With Skyy Moore [a wide receiver and 2022 second round draft pick], we could comfortably give him a grade of incomplete, but they cannot miss on a lot of draft choices. That would be outcome-determinative, relative to them not having a chance to compete meaningfully for championships.

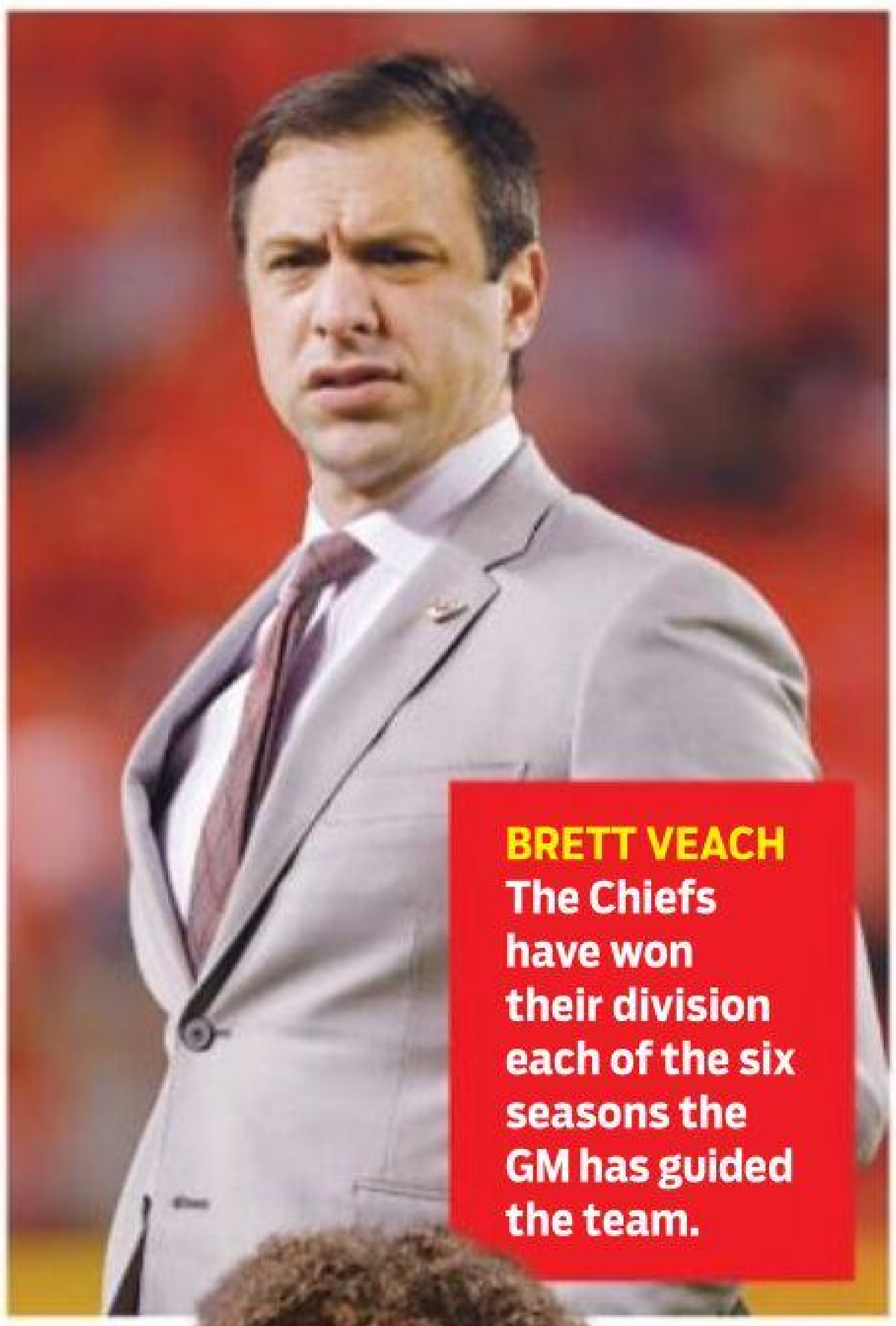
Who do you think their biggest competition will be in the division this year? For me, it's the Chargers because—right now—[new head coach] Jim Harbaugh has the fifth-best winning percentage of all time. He's a true difference maker at coaching. So, that was a huge upgrade for them.



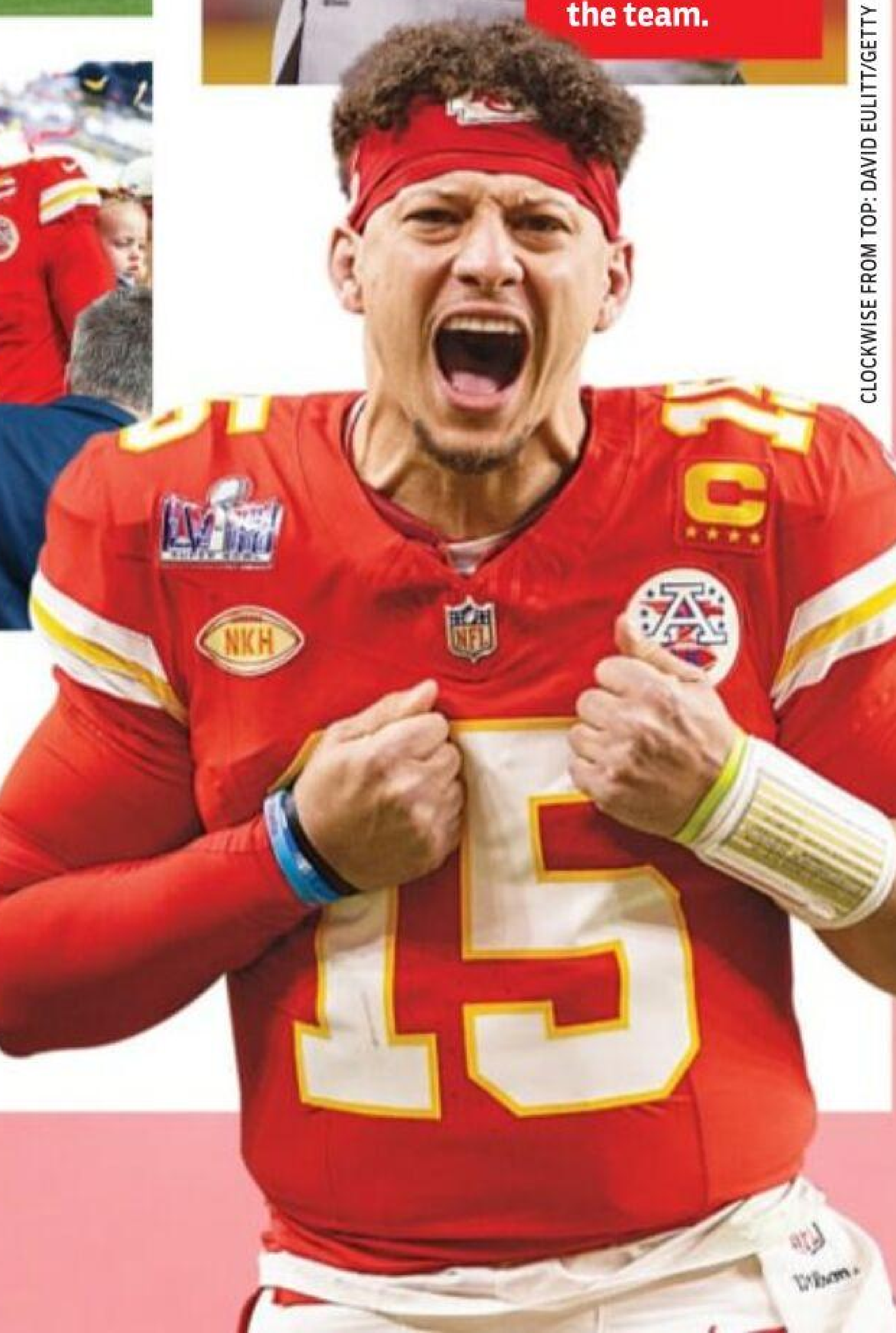
ANDY REID The beloved coach famously sported an icicle mustache during the freezing wild card game against the Dolphins.



PLAYMAKERS From above: LB Nick Bolton, WR Mecole Hardman and QB Patrick Mahomes.



BRETT VEACH The Chiefs have won their division each of the six seasons the GM has guided the team.



> **The Chiefs have gone young in a number of spots, and because their defense is so young, they have a chance to be dynastic.**

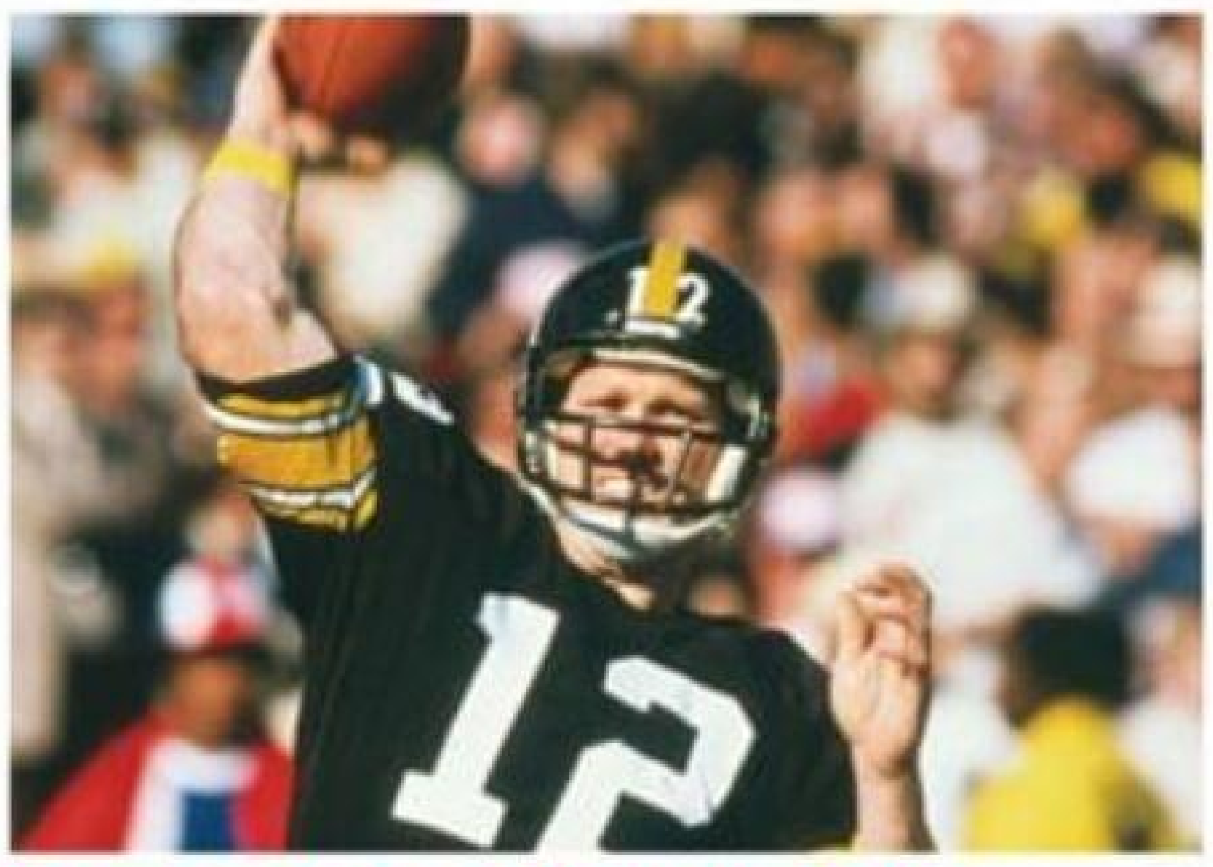
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: DAVID EULITT/GETTY IMAGES; GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL OWENS/GETTY IMAGES; LUKE HALES/GETTY IMAGES; HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES

FOOTBALL'S GREAT DYNASTIES

Will the Chiefs measure up to these other historic teams?

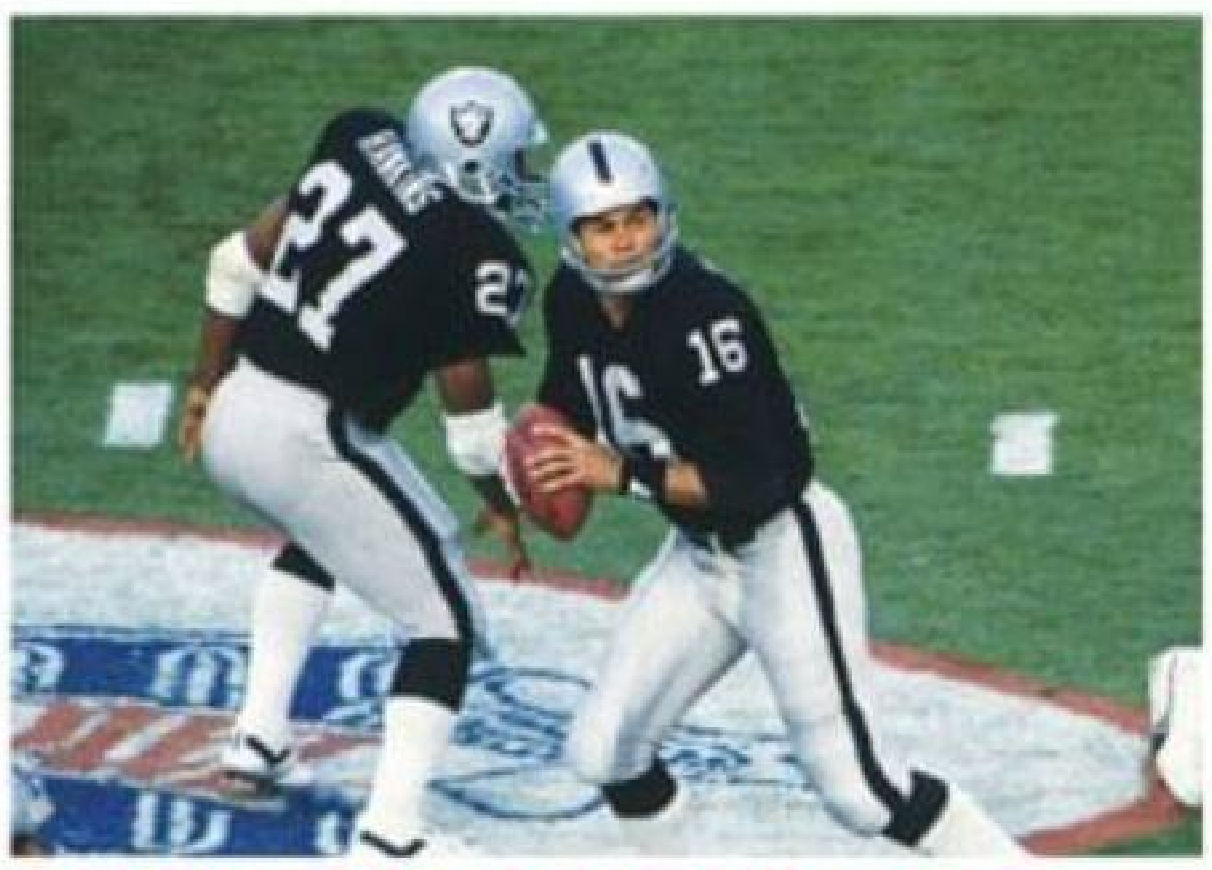
GREEN BAY PACKERS 1960–1967

The Pack made history on and off the field from 1960 to 1967. Head coach and general manager Vince Lombardi recruited or drafted numerous Black players, including Dave Robinson, Herb Adderley and Willie Davis, fully integrating the team. And he treated them with respect. Lombardi also led his teams to NFL Championships in 1961, 1962 and 1965 and to wins in the first two Super Bowls (1966 and 1967).



PITTSBURGH STEELERS 1972–1979

This dynasty only lasted from 1972 to 1979, but it was glorious for fans at home and the brave souls attending games in frigid conditions at Three Rivers Stadium. They won all four Super Bowls in which they appeared, and the names—famous even to those who might have never attended a game—roll off the tongue: Lynn Swann, Terry Bradshaw, Franco Harris, John Stallworth, Jack Ham, Chuck Noll, Joe Greene, L.C. Greenwood and on and on.



OAKLAND/LA RAIDERS 1967–1985

Former owner Al Davis assembled some of the toughest players ever and set them loose on the competition. But the Silver and Black weren't just hard-nosed—they could play. That's why, between 1967 and 1985, the likes of George Blanda, Jack Tatum, Mike Haynes, Art Shell, Jim Otto, Ken Stabler, Marcus Allen and Howie Long, as well as coaches John Madden and Tom Flores, delivered an AFL title, 12 division titles and three Super Bowls.

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS 1981–1994

The Niners, between 1981 and 1994, seemed to finish first in the NFC West every year and shifted seamlessly from Joe Montana to Steve Young and Bill Walsh to George Seifert. They also won five Super Bowls, including SB XIX after going 15–1 during the 1984 season.

DALLAS COWBOYS 1970–1979, 1991–1995

Love or hate the 'Boys, no one can deny that they reigned across two dynasties, 1970–1979 and 1991–1995. They emerged as "America's Team" during the former, regularly playing on Thanksgiving Day. Tom Landry coached them to five NFC Championships and five Super Bowls, with wins in 1971 and 1977. Meanwhile, the early '90s Cowboys won back-to-back Super Bowls (1992, 1993) for Jimmy Johnson and SB XXX for Barry Switzer in 1995.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS 2001–2019

Led by Greatest of All Time quarterback Tom Brady (*see page 4 for more about Brady*) and no-nonsense head coach Bill Belichick, the Patriots won 17 division titles, nine AFC titles and six Super Bowls between 2001 and 2019. Look for Belichick, Brady, Rob Gronkowski and a couple of other key figures from that Pats era to join Randy Moss, Richard Seymour and Ty Law in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: FOCUS ON SPORT/GETTY IMAGES (2); MANNY MILLAN/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED VIA GETTY IMAGES; MADDIE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES; FOCUS ON SPORT VIA GETTY IMAGES (2)

AFC EAST

BUFFALO BILLS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

After a Thanksgiving weekend OT loss to Philadelphia that dropped them to 6–6, Buffalo won five straight, including the de facto AFC East title game in Miami in Week 18, to take their fourth straight division title. They easily beat the Steelers in the wild card round, 31–17.

LOW POINTS

Their improbable end-of-season run was rendered moot after a late-game missed field goal in the divisional playoff round against the Chiefs that left Bills fans reliving the Scott Norwood "wide right" miss to end Super Bowl XXV. The Chiefs bounced Buffalo from the playoffs for the third time in four years.

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Sean McDermott
2023 Record 11–6, first in AFC East, lost in divisional playoff round to the Chiefs
2023 Home Record 7–2
2023 Away Record 4–4

Passing Leader Josh Allen, 579 attempts, 385 completions, 4,306 yards, 29 TDs, 18 interceptions, 24 sacks
Rushing Leader James Cook, 237 carries, 1,112 yards, 2 TDs
Receiving Leader Stefon Diggs, 107 receptions, 1,183 yards, 8 TDs
Defense Leaders Terrel Bernard, 143 tackles; Leonard Floyd, 10.5 sacks; Rasul Douglas, 4 interceptions

> **“The worst thing that can happen for Buffalo is that Josh Allen has to do every single thing for this offense to be successful.”**
>
> **Devin McCourty**

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

WR Keon Coleman drafted from Florida State. Free agents: WR Marquez Valdes-Scantling (after his release by the Chiefs), WR Curtis Samuel (above) from Washington.

LOSSES

WR Stefon Diggs (traded to Houston), WR Gabe Davis (signed with the Jaguars), CB Tre'Davious White (released, signed with the Rams).

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

Buffalo is expected to contend for the division while retooling their offense on the fly. The Stefon Diggs trade generated headlines, but the entire WR corps is basically new, with Buffalo looking for Khalil Shakir to take a step forward.

DEFENSE

A top 10 defense last year, the Bills have lost a lot of veteran leadership on that side of the ball, particularly with safety Jordan Poyer signing with the division rival Dolphins. NBC commentator Devin McCourty hopes to see newly acquired safety Mike Edwards fill in some of that void. LB Terrel Bernard (below) comes off a spectacular second year.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Tyler Bass struggled last year, finishing in the bottom third in field goal percentage and making a career-low 24 field goals.

SPARK PLUG

"He's a guy who never gets any credit," says McCourty of newly signed WR Mack Hollins, who had a career-high 57 catches and 690 receiving yards two years ago with the Raiders. "He makes the catches you don't expect. He makes big plays." *—David Tanklefsky*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: COOPER NEILL/GETTY IMAGES; KEVIN SABITUS/GETTY IMAGES; WESLEY HITT/GETTY IMAGES; G FIUME/GETTY IMAGES; RIC TAPIA/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH

JOSH ALLEN
The extremely mobile QB and the Eagles' Jalen Hurts both set an NFL record for most rushing TDs in a season by a quarterback, with 15 in 2023.

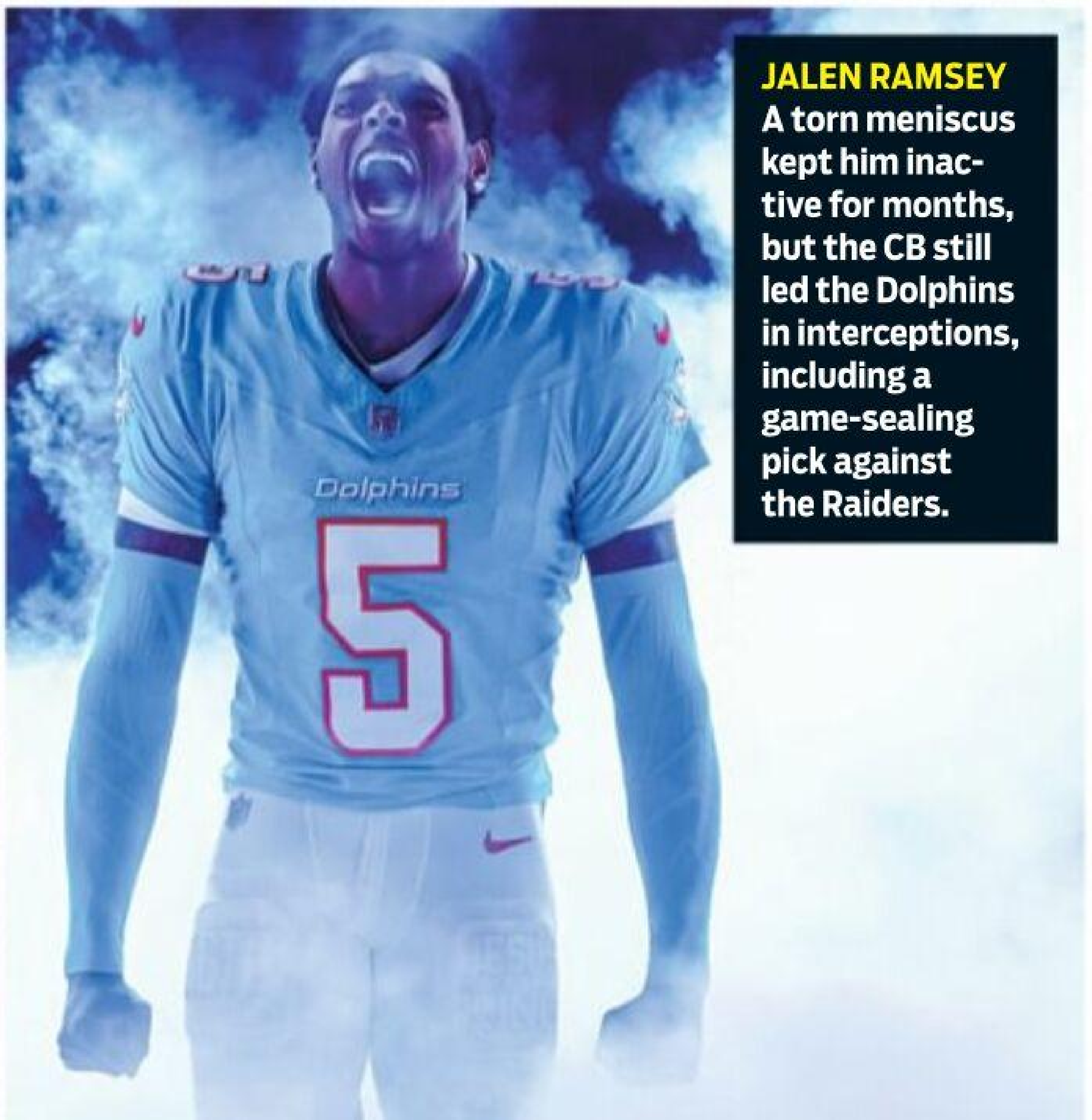
MACK HOLLINS
The 6-foot-4 wide receiver signee adds versatility to the Bills as not only a new target for QB Josh Allen, but as a special teams veteran as well.

JAMES COOK
The running back's breakout season last year led to a 2024 Pro Bowl appearance, thanks in part to 1,567 total yards gained in rushing and receiving.

ONES TO WATCH

TUA TAGOVAILOA The Pro Bowler, who considered retirement prior to 2023 due to myriad injuries, posted a career year and led the league in yards passing.

TYREEK HILL The wide receiver was his quarterback's top target in 2023 and became one of the quickest to reach the 10,000-yards-receiving mark in NFL history.



JALEN RAMSEY A torn meniscus kept him inactive for months, but the CB still led the Dolphins in interceptions, including a game-sealing pick against the Raiders.

MEGAN BRIGGS/GETTY IMAGES (3)

MIAMI DOLPHINS

AFC EAST

> “The big thing with the Dolphins is, you walked away from last year and felt the same way you felt the year before. This team needs a certain toughness about them, a certain grit.”
>
> Devin McCourty

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Mike McDaniel
2023 Record 11–6, second in AFC East; lost in wild card round to the Chiefs
2023 Home Record 7–2
2023 Away Record 4–4

Passing Leader Tua Tagovailoa, 560 attempts, 388 completions, 4,624 yards, 29 TDs, 14 interceptions, 29 sacks
Rushing Leader Raheem Mostert, 209 carries, 1,012 yards, 18 TDs
Receiving Leader Tyreek Hill, 119 receptions, 1,799 yards, 13 TDs
Defense Leaders David Long, 113 tackles; Bradley Chubb, 11 sacks; Jalen Ramsey, 3 interceptions

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINT

With their high-octane offense, Miami finished 2023 with the second-most points scored in team history, remembered best by a 70–20 Week 3 drubbing of the Broncos, in which they became the first team to score 70 points in a game in nearly 60 years.

LOW POINTS

As was the case in 2022, the Dolphins faltered down the stretch, blowing a three-game lead in the division with five to go, including a home loss to Buffalo in the last regular-season game of the year. That was followed by a hapless showing in Kansas City and a first-round playoff exit.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

LEFT: JOHN ADAMS/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: RICH STORRY/GETTY IMAGES

GAINS

LB Chop Robinson (drafted from Penn State), free agents WR Odell Beckham Jr. (released by the Ravens), safety Jordan Poyer (released by the Bills), TE Jonnu Smith (above, released by the Falcons).

LOSSES

Free agent DT Christian Wilkins (to the Raiders), LB Andrew Van Ginkel (Vikings), DT Raekwon Davis (Colts), WR Chase Claypool (Bills) and WR Cedrick Wilson Jr. (Saints).

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

NBC Sports analyst Devin McCourty sees Miami as “super explosive on offense. That doesn’t change.” He expects Odell Beckham Jr.—if healthy—to be a solid No. 3 wide receiver alongside record-setting scorcher WR Tyreek Hill and talented Jaylen Waddle. Add RB Raheem Mostert (right) and you could have the top AFC offense.

DEFENSE

It underperformed in 2023, with the most points allowed for the season of any AFC playoff team. McCourty says they need their best defensive players, like LBs Chubb and Jaelan Phillips, to be healthy all year. Adding veteran defensive end Calais Campbell from the Falcons should help.

SPECIAL TEAMS

They’ll look to improve a struggling kickoff coverage unit that last year allowed opponents the best starting field position in the league.

SPARK PLUG

“This defense was so riddled at the end of the year,” says McCourty. “I love the addition of [safety] Jordan Poyer, from a leadership standpoint and from a toughness standpoint.” *—DT*

AFC EAST

NEW YORK JETS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINT

Do the first three snaps of the season count? All kidding aside, the Jets' plucky OT win over Buffalo in Week 1 was the second-most shocking thing that happened the night of quarterback Aaron Rodgers' infamous injury. It gave Jets fans something to cheer about in an otherwise nightmarish evening, another chapter in the franchise's mostly moribund history.

LOW POINTS

Losing your $75 million future Hall of Fame QB four snaps into the season seems like a safe bet for season low point...but then again, putting the hopes of your Super Bowl–ready roster into the hands of Zach Wilson could be a contender too.

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Robert Saleh
2023 Record 7–10, third in AFC East
2023 Home Record 4–5
2023 Away Record 3–5

Passing Leader Zach Wilson, 368 attempts, 221 completions, 2,271 yards, 8 TDs, 7 interceptions, 46 sacks
Rushing Leader Breece Hall, 223 carries, 994 yards, 5 TDs
Receiving Leader Garrett Wilson, 95 receptions, 1,042 yards, 3 TDs
Defensive Leaders C.J. Mosley, 151 tackles; Bryce Huff, 10 sacks; Jordan Whitehead, 4 interceptions

> “I still think Rodgers can be good enough for this team to be successful. I don't think he has to be an MVP.”
>
> Devin McCourty

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

Drafted OT Olu Fashanu (from Penn State). Free agents: OT Tyron Smith (above, from Dallas), WR Mike Williams (released by the Chargers), DT Javon Kinlaw (from the 49ers), LB Haason Reddick (traded by the Eagles), QB Tyrod Taylor (from the Giants).

LOSSES

QB Zach Wilson and DE John Franklin-Myers (each traded to Denver), RB Dalvin Cook.

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

Call this “Aaron Rodgers, Take Two.” The Jets are ready to run it back with the 40-year-old future Hall of Famer, hoping even a very good Rodgers could pair a very good offense with a great defense to propel the Jets to a deep playoff run. New York has added a weapon for him in WR Mike Williams.

DEFENSE

One of the best defenses in football, the Jets lost their sack leader when DE Bryce Huff signed with Philly, but they hope to fill that hole with Haason Reddick, who has double-digit sack totals in each of the last four years. LB Quincy Williams (right) had a career year in tackles.

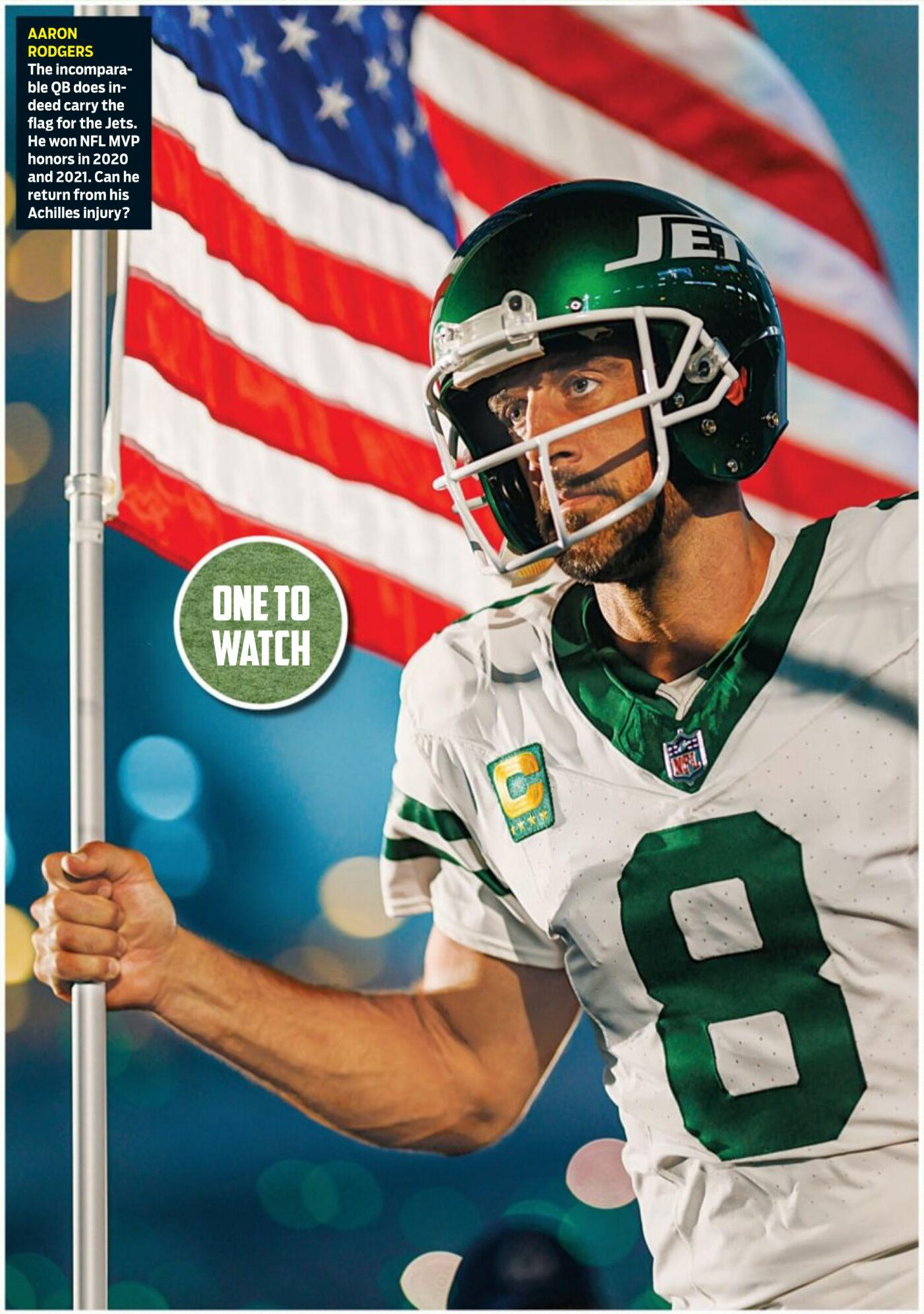
SPECIAL TEAMS

The Jets re-signed 38-year-old punter Thomas Morstead and the guy can still boot it. The long-time Saint led the league in punts of 50-plus yards and was second in punts inside the 20-yard line. That could make for some long afternoons for opposing offenses.

SPARK PLUG

The 6-foot-4 WR Mike Williams is an explosive playmaker with two 1,000-yard-plus seasons on his résumé. He's looking to bounce back after suffering an ACL tear in Week 3 last year with the Los Angeles Chargers. “If Mike Williams can stay healthy,” says NBC Sports analyst Devin McCourty, “that's a guy who could be a problem.” *—DT*

LEFT: WESLEY HITT/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: RYAN KANG/GETTY IMAGES



AARON RODGERS The incomparable QB does indeed carry the flag for the Jets. He won NFL MVP honors in 2020 and 2021. Can he return from his Achilles injury?

KOSTAS LYMPEROPOULOS/NHLI/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH

MICHAEL ONWENU
The OT thrived last season and signed a three-year extension in March. He will anchor a line that hopes to keep sack numbers down.

DEMARIO DOUGLAS
The WR looks to be among a growing receiving corps catching long balls from Drake Maye or offseason QB acquisition Jacoby Brissett.

MATTHEW JUDON
Now back from injuries that hampered his 2023, the star linebacker looks to return to the form that has set him among sack leaders.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM: WINSLOW TOWNSON/GETTY IMAGES; DUSTIN BRADFORD/GETTY IMAGES; RICH BARNES/GETTY IMAGES

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

AFC EAST

> “The goal for them is, how can we create a culture where even if we don’t win a ton of games, we have some guys we can hang our hat on for the future?”
>
> Devin McCourty

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Jerod Mayo
2023 Record 4–13, fourth in AFC East
2023 Home Record 1–8
2023 Away Record 3–5

Passing Leader Mac Jones, 345 attempts, 224 completions, 2,120 yards, 10 TDs, 12 interceptions, 22 sacks
Rushing Leader Ezekiel Elliott, 184 carries, 642 yards, 3 TDs
Receiving Leader DeMario Douglas, 49 receptions, 561 yards, 0 TDs
Defense Leaders: Ja’Whaun Bentley, 114 tackles; Christian Barmore, 8.5 sacks; Kyle Dugger, Jahlani Tavai and Jabrill Peppers, 2 interceptions each

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINT

The Pats posted a surprising 29–25 Week 7 win over Buffalo. That was the team’s lone victory at Gillette Stadium all season. It was an enormous comedown after years of brilliance in Foxborough and beyond.

LOW POINT

It’s so hard to pick just one, but the great Bill Belichick going out with a whimper in a miserable, snow-filled 17–3 Week 18 home loss to the hated Jets has to take the proverbial cake. It was the fifth time the Patriots failed to score a touchdown in a game on the season, and it was the final “Don’t let the door hit you on the way out” moment that led to Belichick’s departure.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

LEFT: TODD ROSENBERG/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES

GAINS

Took QB Drake Maye (above, from North Carolina) with the third pick of the draft. Free agent signings: QB Jacoby Brissett (from Washington), WR K.J. Osborn (from the Vikings) and RB Antonio Gibson (Washington).

LOSSES

QB Mac Jones (traded to the Jaguars), safety Jalen Mills (signed by the Giants) and LB Mack Wilson (signed with the Cardinals).

2024 OUTLOOK >>

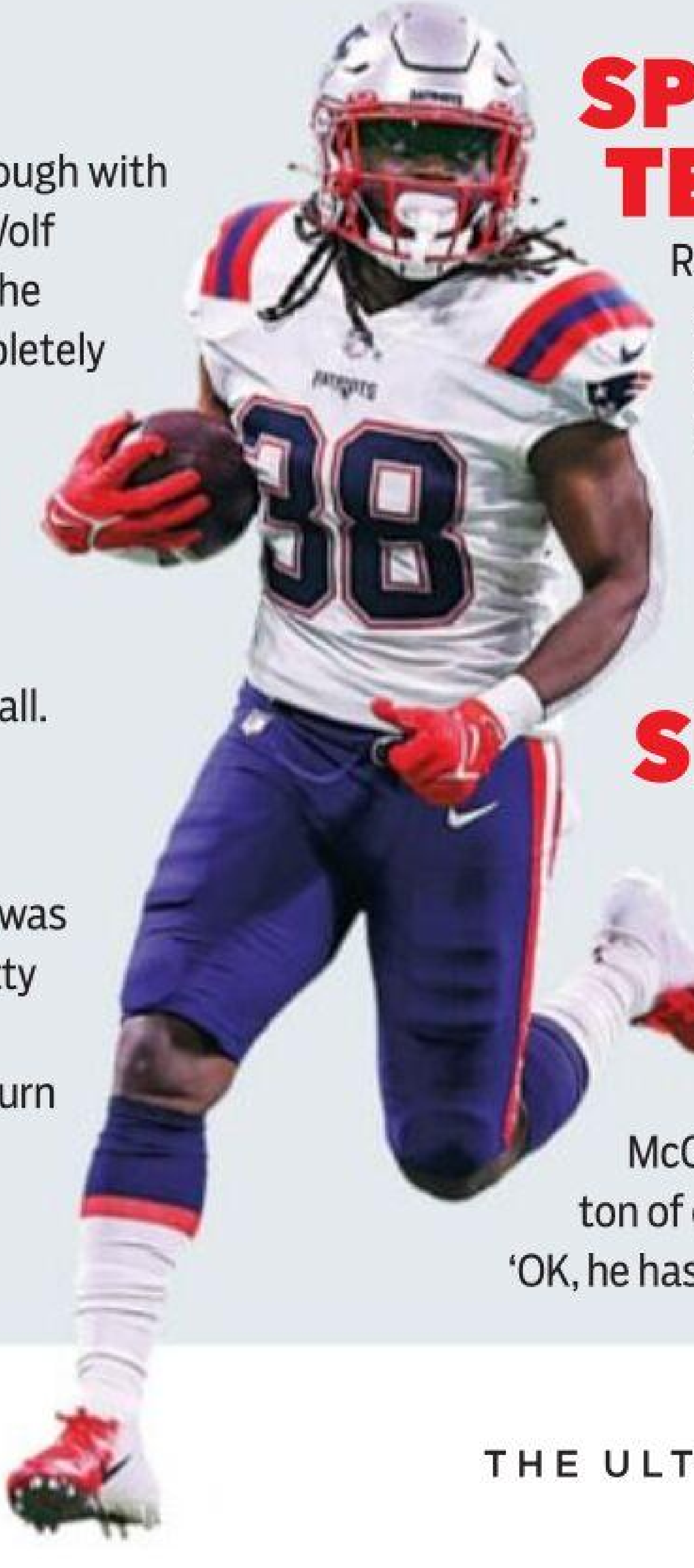
Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

It’s a whole new world in Foxborough with Jerod Mayo in charge and Eliot Wolf calling the shots on personnel. The first order of business is to completely remake one of the most anemic offenses in recent memory. The Pats will have top pick Drake Maye learning from veteran Brissett and RB Rhamondre Stevenson (right) carrying the ball.

DEFENSE

A sneaky little secret last season was that the team’s defense was pretty good. Both sack artist Matthew Judon and Christian Gonzalez return from injuries to an already formidable linebacker group, and they look to shine in 2024.



SPECIAL TEAMS

Rookie kicker Chad Ryland made an NFL-worst 64% of his field goals; he’ll compete for the job with newly signed Joey Slye. Jalen Reagor looked good as a kick returner late in the season.

SPARK PLUG

Maye is the team’s future. “Strong arm, pretty good athlete,” says NBC sports analyst Devin McCourty. “He hasn’t played a ton of college games, but you’re like, ‘OK, he has all the tools.’ ” *—DT*

AFC NORTH

BALTIMORE RAVENS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

The Ravens won the AFC North and earned the top seed in the AFC, going 13–4 and proving that John Harbaugh remains an elite coach. QB Lamar Jackson earned MVP honors for the second time (after doing so in 2019), and in an NFL first, the defense led the league in sacks, takeaways and points allowed per game.

LOW POINTS

Injuries to Marlon Humphrey, Trayvon Mullen, Nick Moore, Keaton Mitchell and others decimated the team, but not enough to derail the juggernaut. Unfortunately, it all came crashing down on January 28, when the Chiefs beat them 17–10 in the AFC Championship Game on the way to winning Super Bowl LVIII.

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach John Harbaugh
2023 Record 13–4, first in their division, lost AFC Championship Game to Kansas City
2023 Home Record 6–3
2023 Road Record 7–1

Passing Leader Lamar Jackson, 457 attempts, 307 completions, 3,678 yards, 24 TDs, 7 interceptions, 37 sacks
Rushing Leader Lamar Jackson, 148 carries, 821 yards, 5 TDs
Receiving Leader Zay Flowers, 77 receptions, 858 yards, 5 TDs
Defensive Leaders Roquan Smith, 158 tackles; Justin Madubuike, 13 sacks; Geno Stone, 7 interceptions

> “Derrick Henry may have been the most consequential signing of any team in the offseason. He’s the guy that can finish the game the last two quarters.”
>
> **Mike Tannenbaum**

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

Free agent RB Derrick Henry, late of the Titans; second-round pick Roger Rosengarten, an offensive tackle from Washington; veteran OT/free agent Josh Jones (above).

LOSSES

Free agent departures include safety Geno Stone (to the Bengals), LB Patrick Queen (Steelers), WR Odell Beckham Jr. (Dolphins), guard John Simpson (Jets) and OLB Jadeveon Clowney (Panthers).

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

The team had many of the requisite parts, but it’s never good when your quarterback is also your best rusher, even when Lamar Jackson is league MVP. That’s why ESPN analyst Mike Tannenbaum loves the addition of Derrick Henry, which he believes could pay huge dividends.

DEFENSE

First-round pick Nate Wiggins (Clemson) must live up to expectations at cornerback. “He has the length and speed to do so,” Tannenbaum says. All-Pro LB Roquan Smith (far right) remains a team pillar.

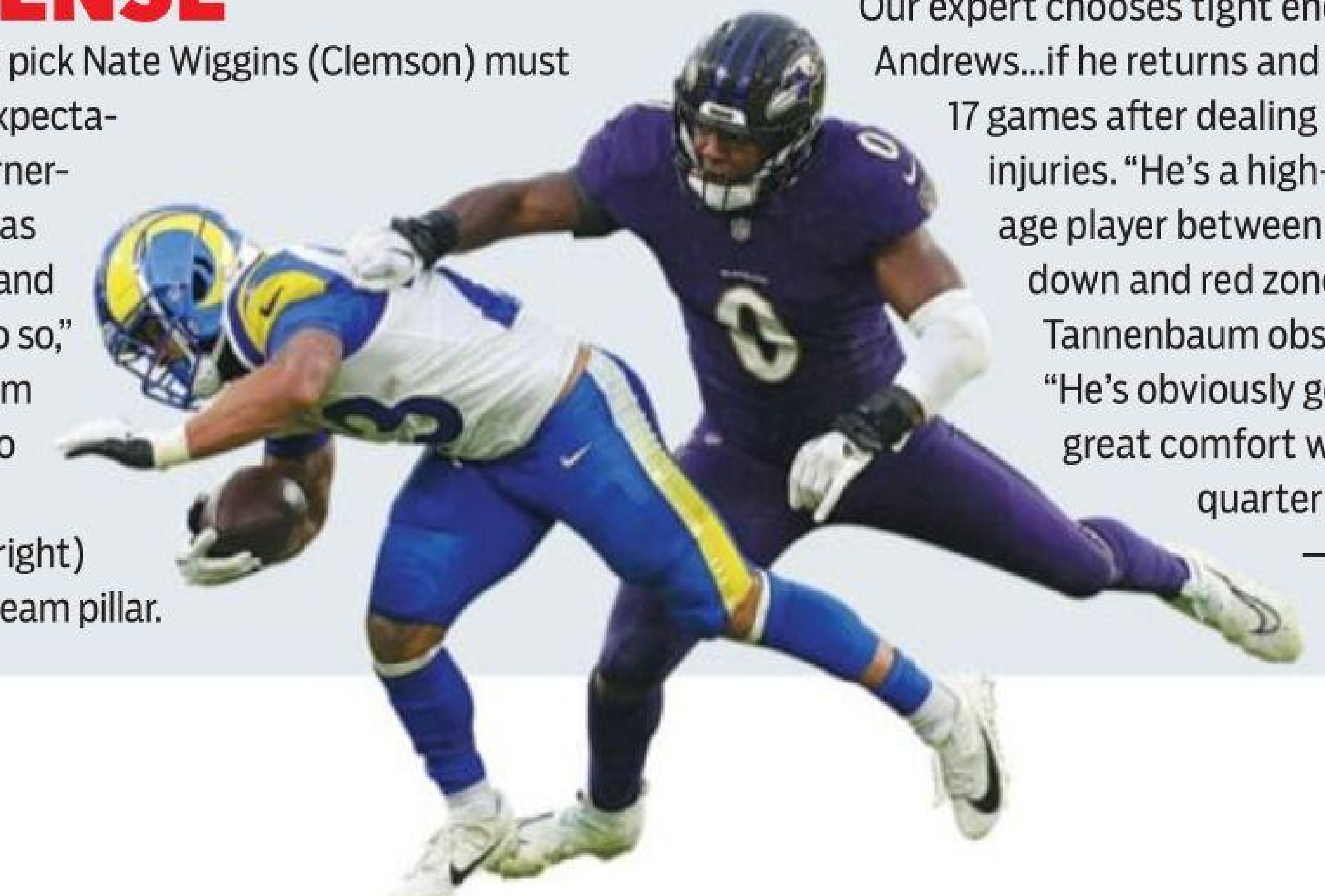
SPECIAL TEAMS

“They should be good,” Tannenbaum says, adding that he likes Jordan Stout as the team’s punter and considers seven-time Pro Bowl kicker Justin Tucker to be “in the conversation for one of the greatest of all time.”

SPARK PLUG

Our expert chooses tight end Mark Andrews...if he returns and plays 17 games after dealing with injuries. “He’s a high-leverage player between third down and red zone,” Tannenbaum observes. “He’s obviously got a great comfort with the quarterback.”

—Ian Spelling



LEFT: ROB CARR/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: PAUL SPINELLI VIA AP

ONES TO WATCH

DERRICK HENRY
"King Henry" comes to the Ravens from the Titans, where in eight seasons, he put up the kind of numbers that have him poised to head to Canton one day.

MARK ANDREWS
The tight-end great returns from an ankle injury and looks to recover his form after leading all TEs in receptions and yards in 2021.

LAMAR JACKSON
In 2019, the incomparable QB set the NFL record for most yards rushing by a quarterback in a single season, with 1,206 on 176 carries.

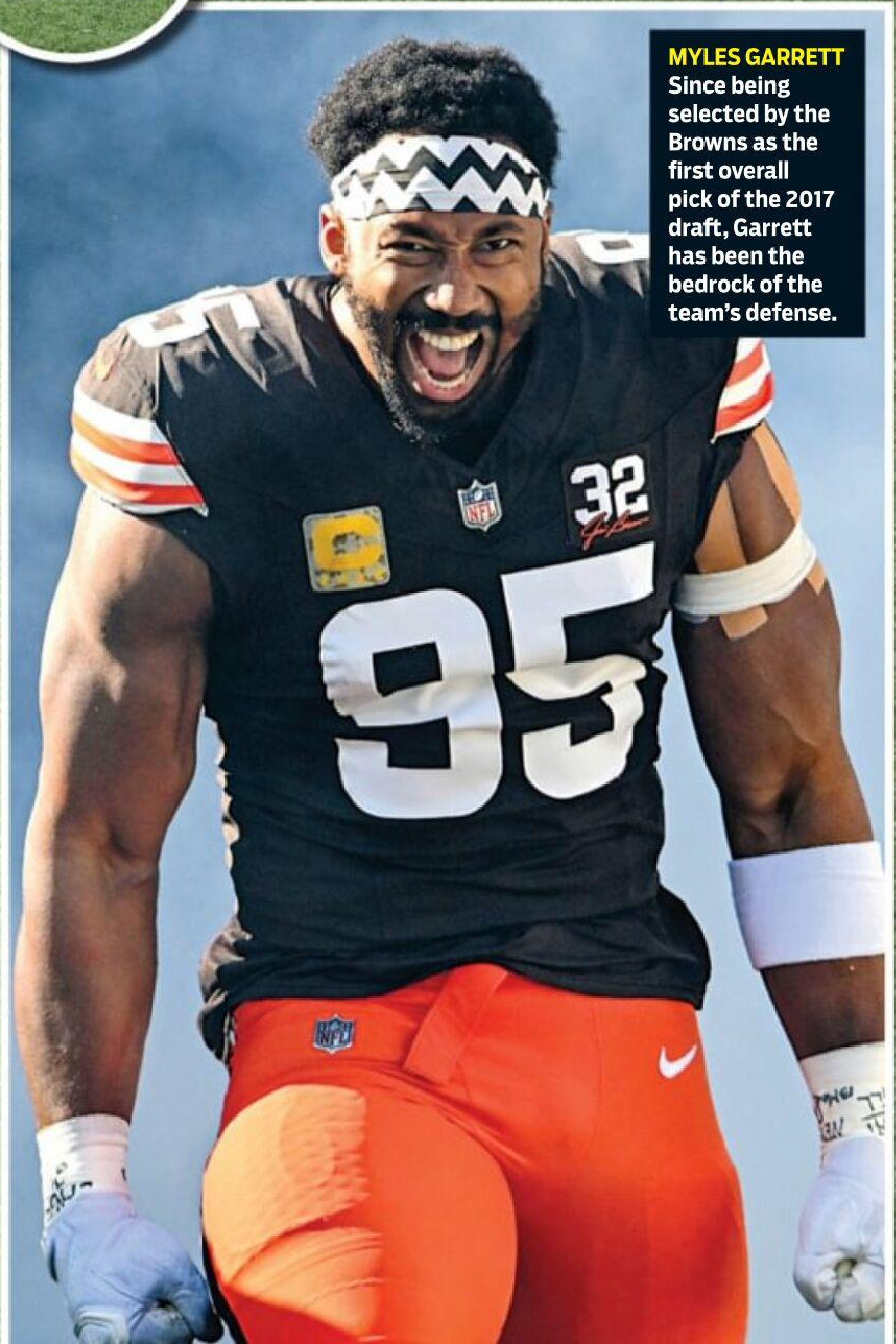
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COOPER NEILL/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL OWENS/GETTY IMAGES; ROBIN ALAM/ISI PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH

JOEL BITONIO
A true NFL iron man, the offensive guard looks to bounce back from a series of 2023 injuries that saw him miss two games.

DESHAUN WATSON
After surgery on his throwing shoulder, the team's QB has a chance to pick up from a solid performance in his six 2023 games.

DAVID NJOKU
The Pro Bowl tight end had his best season last year, including a 7-catch game against the Texans in the Browns' playoff loss.



MYLES GARRETT
Since being selected by the Browns as the first overall pick of the 2017 draft, Garrett has been the bedrock of the team's defense.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: RIC TAPIA/GETTY IMAGES; TODD KIRKLAND/GETTY IMAGES; NICK CAMMETT/GETTY IMAGES; RYAN KANG/GETTY IMAGES

CLEVELAND BROWNS

AFC NORTH

> **The Browns are not a great team. They’re a team with a massive question mark. It comes back to their quarterback—the less noise around Deshaun Watson, the better.**
>
> Mike Tannenbaum

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Kevin Stefanski
2023 Record 11–6, second in the AFC North, lost to Houston in the wild card round
2023 Home Record 8–1
2023 Road Record 3–5

Passing Leader Joe Flacco, 204 attempts, 123 completions, 1,616 yards, 13 TDs, 8 interceptions, 8 sacks
Rushing Leader Jerome Ford, 204 carries, 813 yards, 4 TDs
Receiving Leader David Njoku, 81 receptions, 882 yards, 6 TDs
Defense Leaders Jeremiah Owusu-Koramoah, 101 tackles; Myles Garrett, 14 sacks; Martin Emerson Jr., 4 interceptions

2023 WRAP-UP

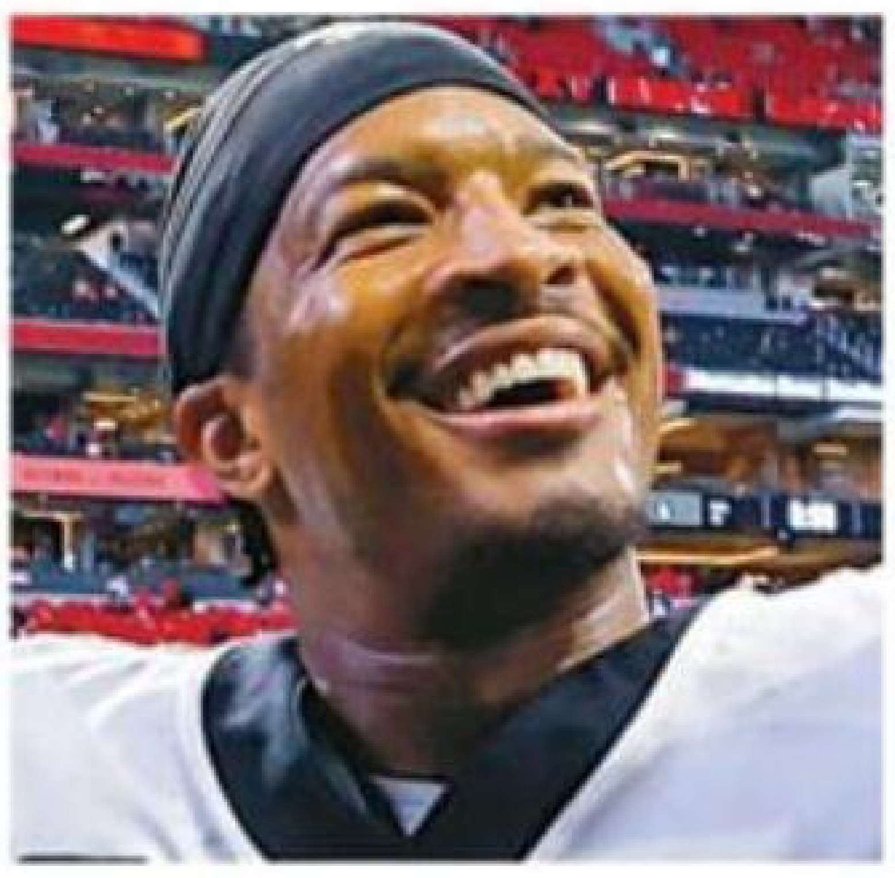
HIGH POINTS

The Browns rebounded from a disastrous 7–10 2022 season to go 11–6 and reach the playoffs for the first time since 2020. Shocking pretty much everyone, they finished second in their division. Veteran QB Joe Flacco led the charge and won Comeback Player of the Year honors.

LOW POINTS

Cleveland cycled through five QBs: Flacco, Jeff Driskel, P.J. Walker, Deshaun Watson and Dorian Thompson-Robinson. All the elation generated by the season’s success and Flacco’s feel-good story went down the drain in the wild card round when the Texans crushed the Browns 45–14.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL



GAINS

The Browns traded for solid Broncos WR Jerry Jeudy. Free agent signings include tackle Hakeem Adeniji (from the Vikings); QB Jameis Winston (above), signed from the Saints, will back up Watson.

LOSSES

Last season’s savior QB Joe Flacco signed with the Colts. Also moving on—several team coaches, including offensive coordinator Alex Van Pelt, who’s now with the Patriots.

LEFT: JASON MILLER/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: NICK CAMMETT/DIAMOND IMAGES/ GETTY IMAGES

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

ESPN analyst Mike Tannenbaum wonders if QB Deshaun Watson, who has dealt with lots of off-field issues, will ever approach his previous form. “Every year we get [further] away from that last good season in Houston [in 2020],” he says. “To me, he becomes a bigger question.” WR Amari Cooper (right) can help him answer it.

DEFENSE

Remember how linebacker great Lawrence Taylor once absolutely dominated the game? So, too, does five-time Pro Bowler and 2023’s Defensive Player of the Year Myles Garrett. “Garrett,” praises Tannenbaum, “is in the conversation for the best non-quarterback in the NFL.”

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Browns have some question marks here, Tannenbaum notes. “If they can get more consistency out of their kicker,” he says, “assuming it’s going to be Dustin Hopkins, it’ll be the key.”

SPARK PLUG

If RB Nick Chubb can return and stay healthy, “he’ll be meaningfully important to the Browns, because he’s a true difference-maker,” Tannenbaum says, adding, “With Watson’s inconsistency, you need an ‘A’ there.” *—IS*

PITTSBURGH STEELERS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

In Week 5, the Steelers won their 700th game as a franchise, up there with the Giants, Packers and Bears in NFL history. The team also notched their 20th straight non-losing season, the last 17 under head coach Mike Tomlin. Even better, they returned to the playoffs after a year's absence.

LOW POINTS

The Bills beat them 31–17 in the wild card round, fittingly, since the team averaged only 17.9 points per game. During the season, they fielded three different QBs, which didn't help matters, and despite signing Mitchell Trubisky to a second two-year contract in 2023, the Steelers released their wildly inconsistent QB.

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Mike Tomlin
2023 Record 10–7, third in the AFC North, lost to the Bills in the wild card round
2023 Home Record 5–4
2023 Road Record 5–3

Passing Leader Kenny Pickett, 324 attempts, 201 completions, 2,070 yards, 6 TDs, 4 interceptions, 23 sacks
Rushing Leader Najee Harris, 255 carries, 1,035 yards, 8 TDs
Receiving Leader George Pickens, 63 receptions, 1,140 yards, 5 TDs
Defense Leaders Elandon Roberts, 101 tackles; T.J. Watt, 19 sacks; Patrick Peterson, Levi Wallace, Damontae Kazee and Alex Highsmith, 2 interceptions each

> **“The offensive line is good and they're going to run the ball then throw it over your head. Rookie WR Roman Wilson will have 5 or 6 touchdowns. That will be breathtaking.”**
>
> **Mike Tannenbaum**

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

QBs Russell Wilson (signed after release by the Broncos) and Justin Fields (above, traded from the Bears) will vie to start. Also: LBs Payton Wilson (third round, drafted from NC State) and free agent Patrick Queen, a former Raven.

LOSSES

Traded WR Diontae Johnson to the Panthers and QB Kenny Pickett (Eagles). Also gone: center Mason Cole and CB Patrick Peterson.

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

ESPN analyst Mike Tannenbaum likes what he sees in the Steelers under new offensive coordinator Arthur Smith. “I love his success with Ryan Tannehill in Tennessee,” he says, referring to the quarterback's 2020 career year under Smith, then the Titans' assistant coach. “When you look at Justin Fields, he has a very similar skill set.”

DEFENSE

Tannenbaum sees some ifs ahead for the team this season. “Joey Porter Jr. has a chance to be a true leader,” he says as the CB begins his sophomore season. He also has concerns about safety Minkah Fitzpatrick (left) and linebacker T.J. Watt, noting, “If they can stay healthy, they're still a great defense.”

SPECIAL TEAMS

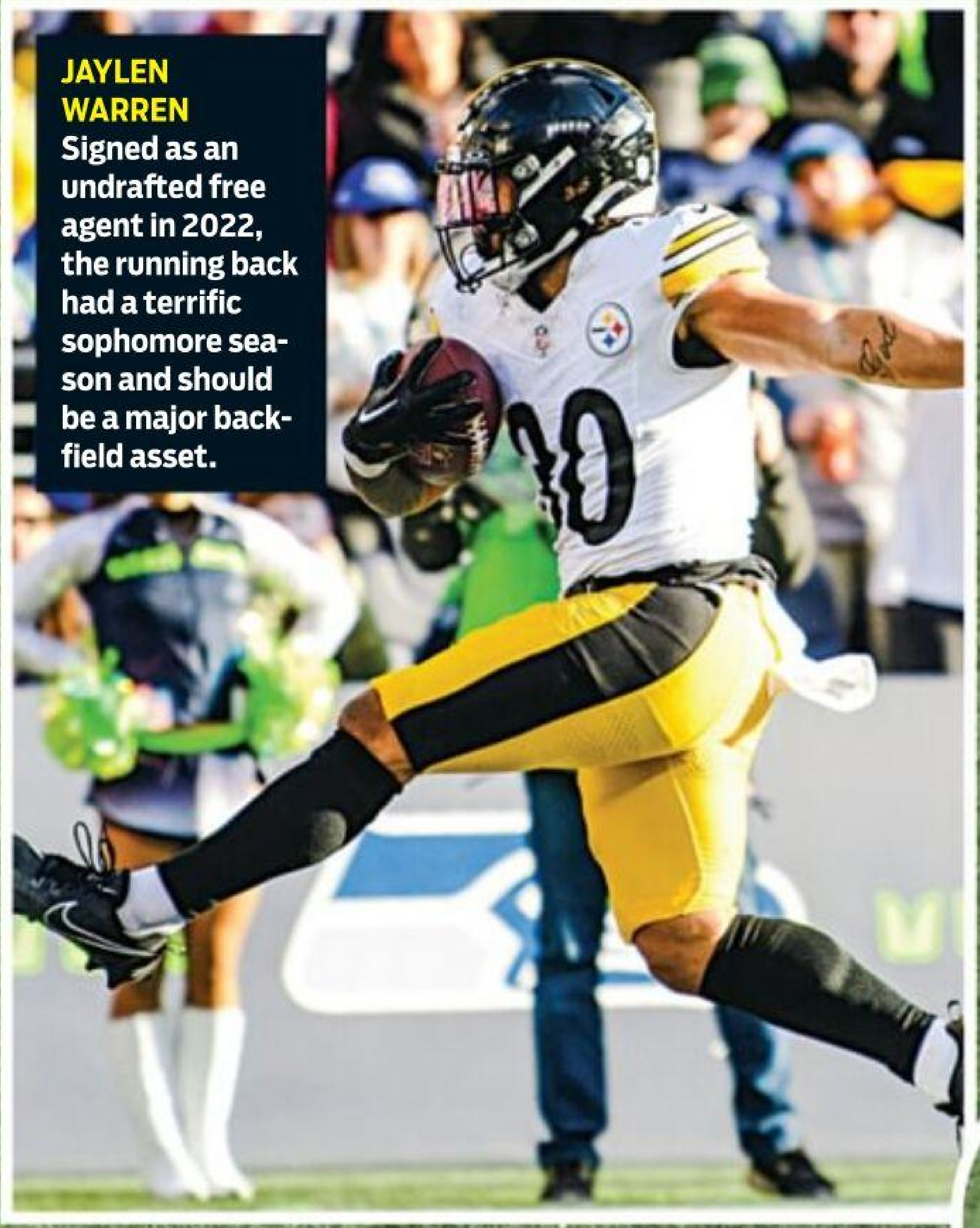
Chris Boswell begins his 10th season as kicker for the Steelers after a solid 2023, and Cameron Johnston comes over from the Texans for punting duty. But Tannenbaum says it's too early to tell “how the return game will shake out.”

SPARK PLUG

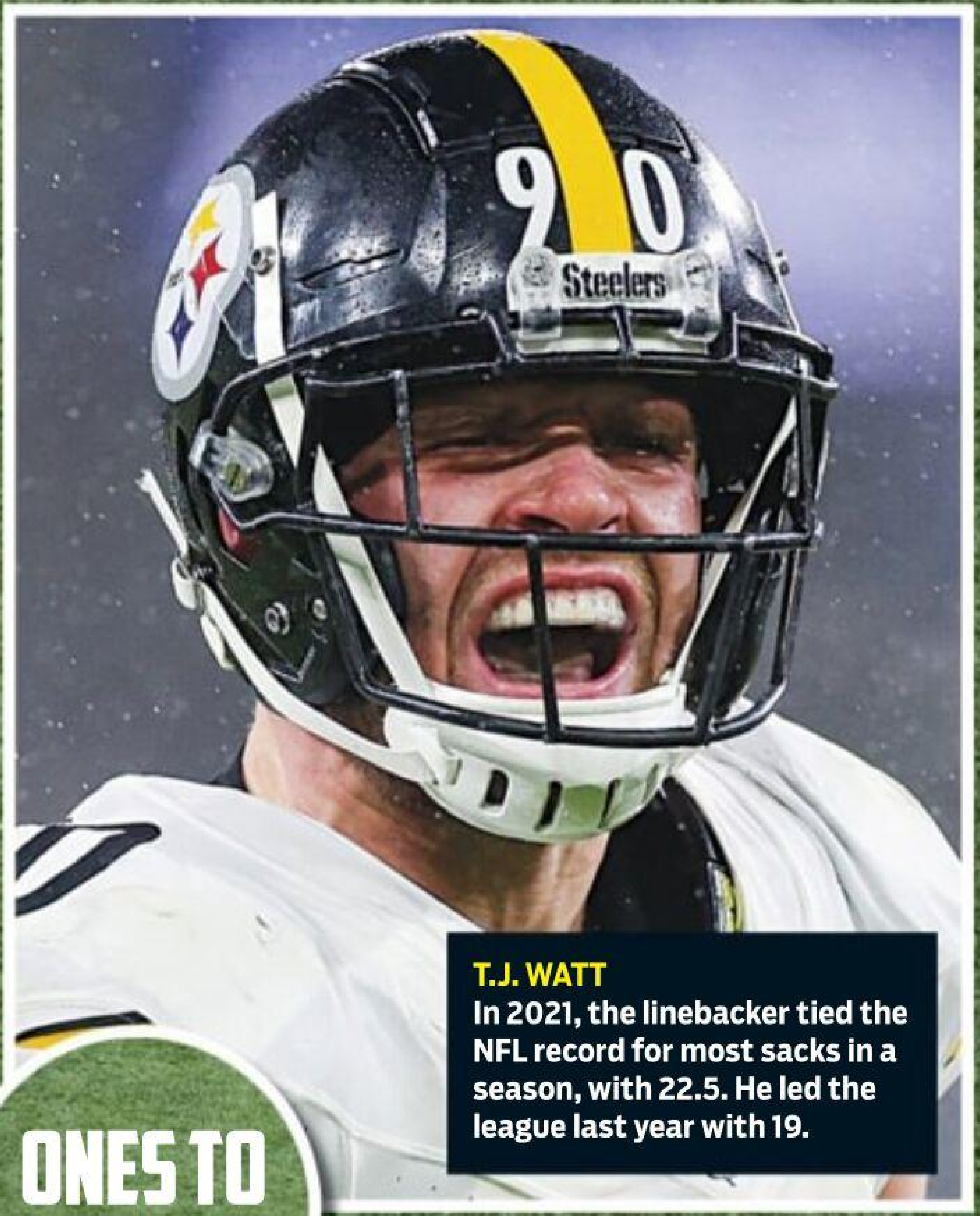
While Tannenbaum believes Justin Fields is someone fans should watch out for, he taps Jaylen Warren here, based on “how explosive he can be, and the way the Steelers play” when the third-year RB is on the field. —*IS*

LEFT: JOHN FISHER/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: JANE GERSHOVICH/GETTY IMAGES

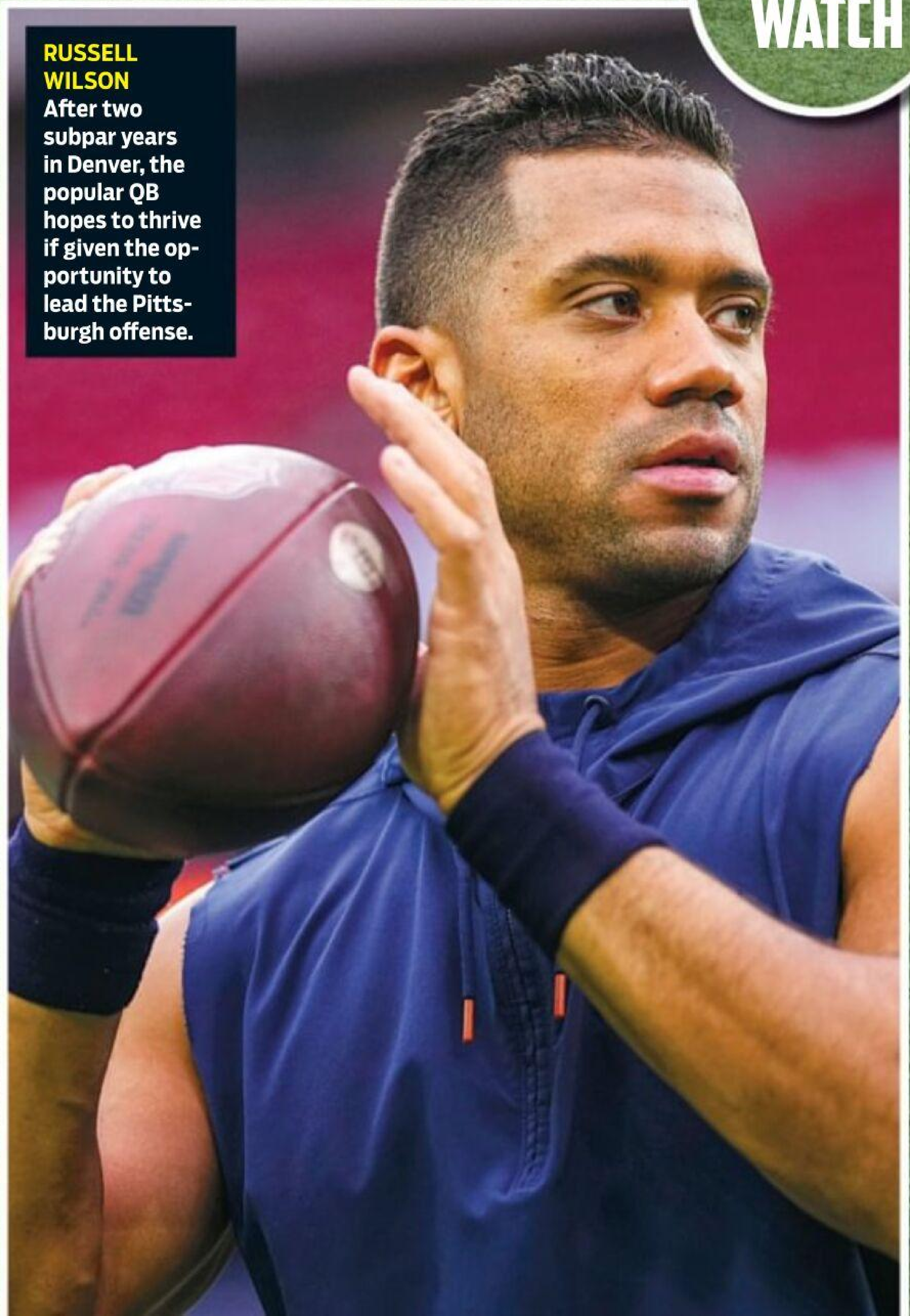
ONES TO WATCH



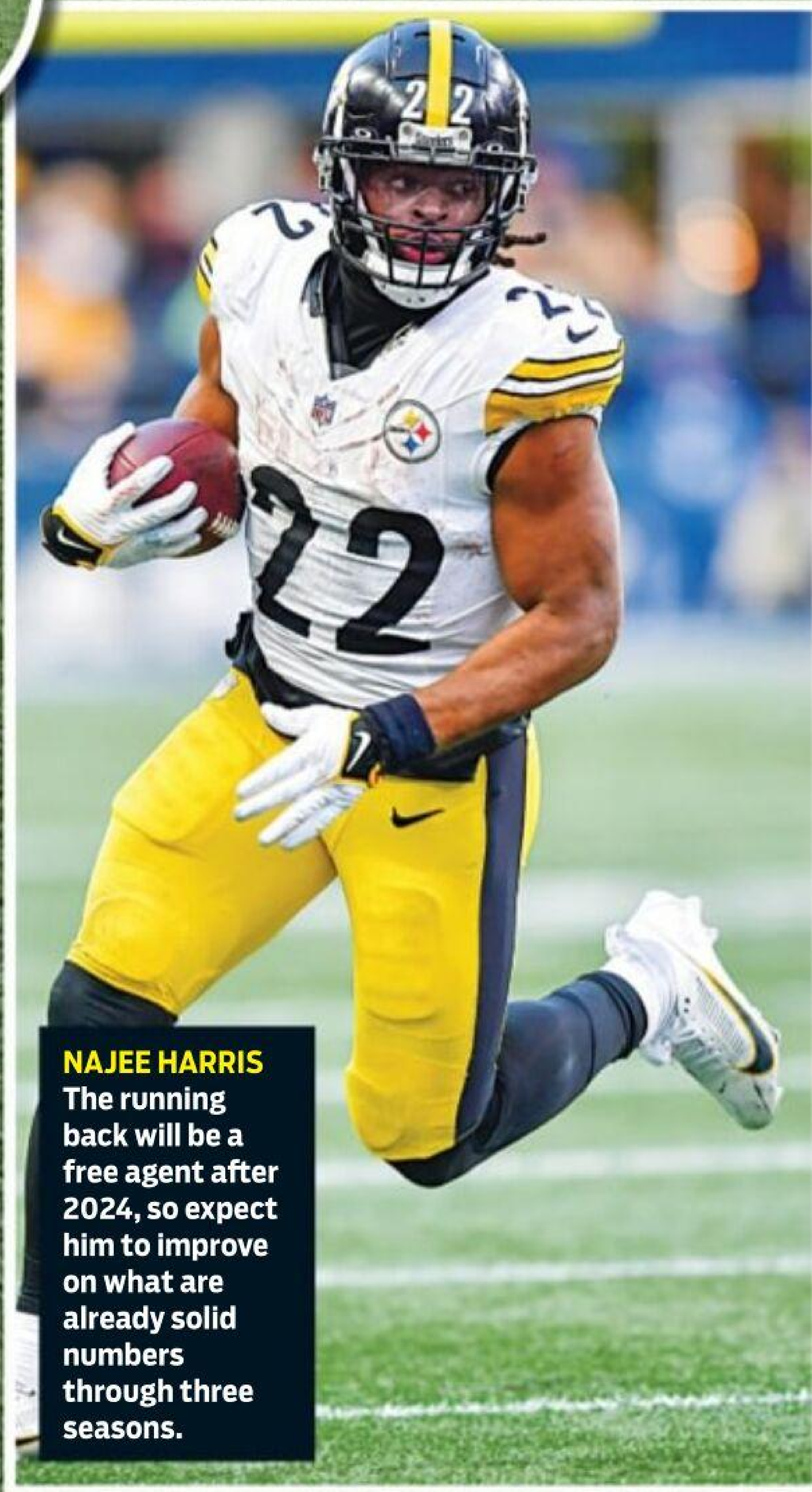
JAYLEN WARREN
Signed as an undrafted free agent in 2022, the running back had a terrific sophomore season and should be a major backfield asset.



T.J. WATT
In 2021, the linebacker tied the NFL record for most sacks in a season, with 22.5. He led the league last year with 19.



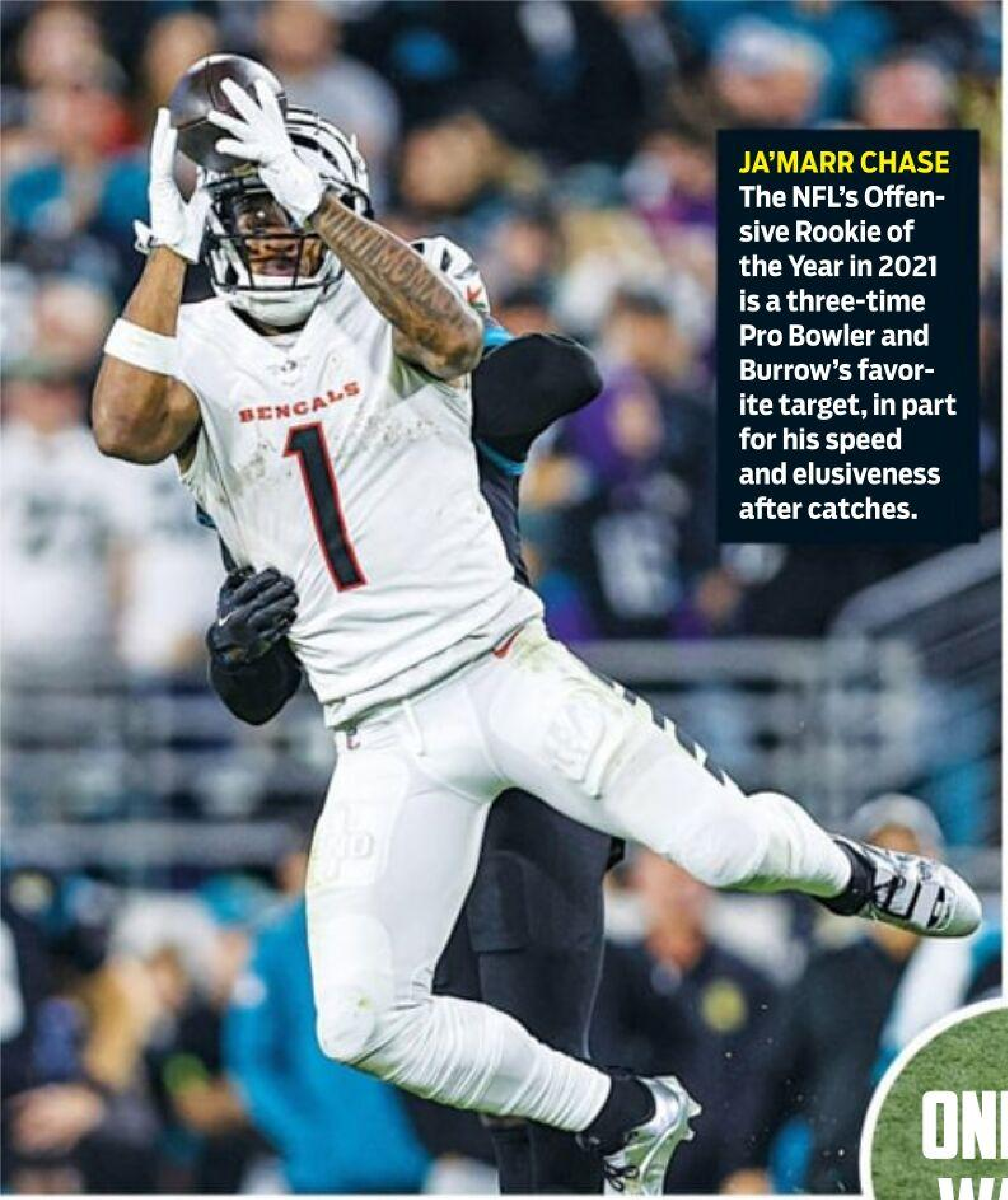
RUSSELL WILSON
After two subpar years in Denver, the popular QB hopes to thrive if given the opportunity to lead the Pittsburgh offense.



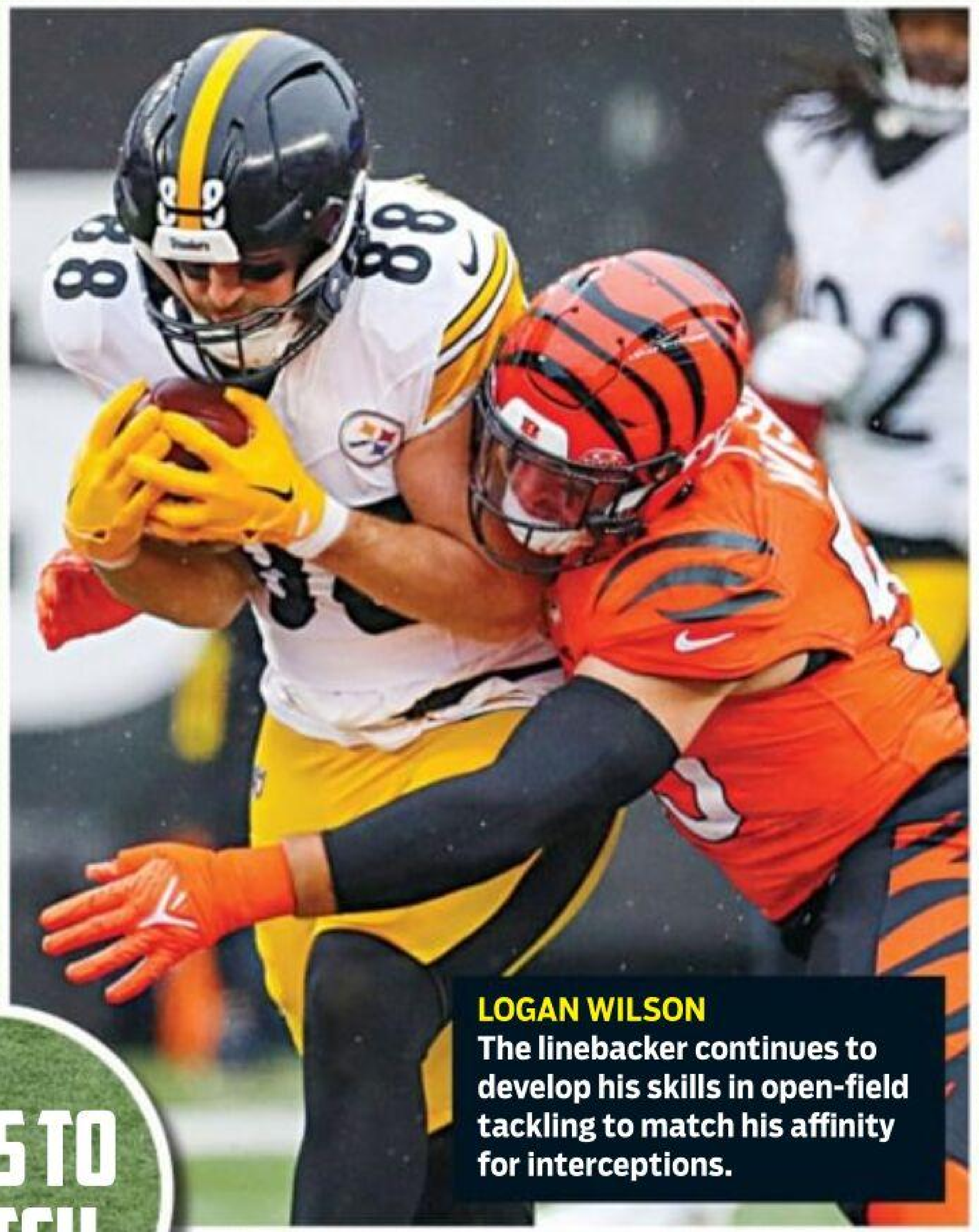
NAJEE HARRIS
The running back will be a free agent after 2024, so expect him to improve on what are already solid numbers through three seasons.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: KIRK IRWIN/GETTY IMAGES; PATRICK SMITH/GETTY IMAGES; JANE GERSHOVICH/GETTY IMAGES; JANE GERSHOVICH/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH



JA'MARR CHASE
The NFL's Offensive Rookie of the Year in 2021 is a three-time Pro Bowler and Burrow's favorite target, in part for his speed and elusiveness after catches.



LOGAN WILSON
The linebacker continues to develop his skills in open-field tackling to match his affinity for interceptions.

JOE BURROW
Forget last season's injury; the calm, cool QB has given the Bengals something they haven't had in years: a field general who can lead them to greatness.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: COOPER NEILL/GETTY IMAGES; PERRY KNOTTS/GETTY IMAGES; IAN JOHNSON/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES

CINCINNATI BENGALS

AFC NORTH

> **Joe Burrow has gone into Arrowhead and beaten Patrick Mahomes. I want to see him do that again. He's proved to have big-game moxie.**
>
> **Mike Tannenbaum**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Zac Taylor
2023 Record 9–8, last in the AFC North and first time missing the playoffs since 2020
2023 Home Record 6–3
2023 Road Record 3–5

Passing Leader Joe Burrow, 365 attempts, 244 completions, 2,309 yards, 15 TDs, 6 interceptions, 24 sacks
Rushing Leader Joe Mixon, 257 carries, 1,034 yards, 9 TDs
Receiving Leader Ja'Marr Chase, 100 receptions, 1,216 yards, 7 TDs
Defense Leaders Logan Wilson, 135 tackles; Trey Hendrickson, 17.5 sacks; Logan Wilson and Cam Taylor-Britt, 4 interceptions each

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

Backup QB Jake Browning, with help from wide receivers Ja'Marr Chase and Tee Higgins, kept the Bengals in playoff contention longer than anyone dared hope after Joe Burrow went down with a season-ending injury. And fans took some satisfaction in the Bengals beating the Browns 31–14 in Week 18 to finish 9–8.

LOW POINTS

The Bengals, riding high expectations after a 12–4 season in 2022, disappointed with a slow start and two big losses down the stretch that knocked them out of the playoffs. But nothing hurt more than watching Burrow somehow suffer a torn ligament in his right wrist while throwing a touchdown pass in November.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

Signed superb safety Geno Stone from the division-rival Ravens. Other key free agents: DT Sheldon Rankins (from the Texans) and TE Mike Gesicki (above, the Patriots). In the draft: Georgia OT Amarius Mims and Michigan DT Kris Jenkins.

LOSSES

DJ Reader, the popular DT, signed with the Lions. And RB Joe Mixon signed with the Texans.

LEFT: RYAN KANG/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: AP PHOTO/GARY MCCULLOUGH

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

ESPN analyst Mike Tannenbaum is rooting for Joe Burrow to play all 17 games. "His health is paramount." Another big factor for the coming season is the development of third-round pick Jermaine Burton, WR from Alabama, poised to be a target alongside Ja'Marr Chase and Tee Higgins.

DEFENSE

Tannenbaum suggests the key is for DEs Trey Hendrickson (right) and Sam Hubbard to be A players, adding that the team has youth on its side and can build off it: "Can they keep those [players] happy and signed to allow for the development of a young secondary?"

SPECIAL TEAMS

Both kicker Evan McPherson and punter Brad Robbins hope for a better 2024, but the new kickoff rules, which will create more runbacks than last season, will play a big role in how the Bengals will be judged on special teams.

SPARK PLUG

Tannenbaum sees Mike Gesicki as a major red-zone contributor. "Joe Burrow hasn't had somebody like him," he argues of the team's new tight end, "and I don't think Gesicki has had somebody like Burrow." *—IS*

HOUSTON TEXANS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINT

The Texans trounced the Browns 45–14 in the AFC Wild Card playoff game (after losing to them in Week 16), a big upset considering they had the second-worst record in the NFL the previous year. It represented the culmination of their great turnaround under new head coach DeMeco Ryans.

LOW POINTS

Week 14 proved a double blow to QB C.J. Stroud during his otherwise sensational rookie season. First, the Jets held him to 91 yards and 10 completions; he also suffered a concussion. But he picked up where he left off in his first game back. Then, losing big to the Ravens in the second round of the playoffs surely hurt.

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach DeMeco Ryans
2023 Record 10–7, won the division, lost to the Ravens in the AFC Divisional Round
2023 Home Record 6–3
2023 Away Record 4–4

Passing Leader C.J. Stroud, 499 attempts, 319 completions, 4,108 yards, 23 TDs, 5 interceptions, 38 sacks
Rushing Leader Devin Singletary, 216 carries, 898 yards, 4 TDs
Receiving Leader Nico Collins, 80 receptions, 1,297 yards, 8 TDs
Defense Leaders Blake Cashman, 106 tackles; Jonathan Greenard, 12.5 sacks; Derek Stingley Jr., 5 interceptions

> **“Coach Ryans set a tone, and a culture, that he wanted the team to get to, and I think they did, pretty quickly. And they got better in the offseason.”**
>
> **Charles Davis**

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

WR Stefon Diggs through a trade with the Bills; RB Joe Mixon in a trade with the Bengals; free agent and four-time Pro Bowl DE Danielle Hunter (above), signed from the Vikings; and LB Azeez Al-Shaair, signed from the Titans.

LOSSES

LBs Jonathan Greenard and Blake Cashman signed with the Vikings. RB Devin Singletary signed with the Giants.

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

Quarterback C.J. Stroud already had an outstanding O-line and targets in Nico Collins (right) and Tank Dell. Now he has one of the NFL's best: wide receiver Stefon Diggs. Stroud's biggest challenge becomes getting everyone the ball, according to CBS Sports NFL analyst Charles Davis. “It's a great problem to have.”

DEFENSE

The Texans' great defense—featuring Defensive Rookie of the Year Will Anderson Jr.—goes to another level with the signings of Danielle Hunter, one of the best edge rushers in the league; defensive end Denico Autry; and premier linebacker Azeez Al-Shaair. That, plus drafting cornerback Kamari Lassiter, should help shore up the unit's weak point: pass defense.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Ka'imi Fairbairn performed well last year. Free agent signee and former All-Pro punter Tommy Townsend is an upgrade.

SPARK PLUG

Tank Dell is the most explosive wide receiver on the roster and will be a problem for opposing defenses. Adds Davis, “Stefon Diggs could have similar impact.” —*Marc Freeman*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: FRED KFOURY III/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES; CARMEN MANDATO/GETTY IMAGES; KIRK IRWIN/GETTY IMAGES; WESLEY HITT/GETTY IMAGES; STEPHEN MATUREN/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH

C.J. STROUD The NFL's Offensive Rookie of the Year was remarkably poised, bringing a tremendous sense of anticipation for his sophomore season.

WILL ANDERSON JR. After posting 45 tackles and 7 sacks in his first season, this talented defensive end (front) looks to be a pillar on the team for years.

JOE MIXON "When you go to a new place, you've got to prove yourself," says Davis of the big running back pickup, who he believes will be extra motivated to succeed.

TREVOR LAWRENCE
The overall first pick of the 2021 draft made the 2023 Pro Bowl and, after an injury-plagued season, must now play like a champion.

ONES TO WATCH

EVAN ENGRAM
In 2023, he became only the eighth tight end in history with 100 or more catches in a season. Another Pro Bowl season from him would delight the Jags.

JOSH ALLEN
Tied for second league-wide in sacks last year, Allen signed a five-year contract extension in April. The pressure will be on to perform.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: LESLIE PLAZA JOHNSON/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES; TIM WARNER/GETTY IMAGES (2)

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS

AFC SOUTH

> **They had a better football team than how they finished last year. They have no one to blame but themselves. I can see a bounce back.**
>
> Charles Davis

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Doug Pederson
2023 Record 9–8, tied for second in their division
2023 Home Record 4–5
2023 Away Record 5–3

Passing Leader Trevor Lawrence, 564 attempts, 370 completions, 4,016 yards, 21 TDs, 14 interceptions, 35 sacks
Rushing Leader Travis Etienne Jr., 267 carries, 1,008 yards, 11 TDs
Receiving Leader Evan Engram, 114 receptions, 963 yards, 4 TDs
Defense Leaders Foyesade Oluokun, 173 tackles; Josh Allen, 17.5 sacks; Andre Cisco and Darious Williams, 4 interceptions each

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINT

Their Week 12 win over Houston after a 53-yard Brandon McManus field goal put the team at 8–3, with a head of steam in a march toward a return to the playoffs. So much was going right.

LOW POINT

A Week 18 loss to the Titans capped an epic end-of-season collapse in which the team lost five of its final six games, in large part because the offensive line struggled, the defense didn't play up to its capabilities and quarterback Trevor Lawrence played hurt. They have a lot to answer for and will have no excuses if they can't deliver for a second straight year, given higher expectations.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

DT Arik Armstead (above) was a great pickup after his release by the 49ers; also, WR Gabe Davis (signed from the Bills) and safety Darnell Savage (signed from the Packers). The Jags drafted LSU WR Brian Thomas Jr. in Round 1.

LOSSES

WR Calvin Ridley signed with the rival Titans and safety Rayshawn Jenkins with the Seahawks. CB Darious Williams was released.

LEFT: COURTNEY CULBREATH/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

This is the year where it all has to come together for quarterback Trevor Lawrence, says CBS Sports NFL analyst Charles Davis. A new center will help solidify a weak offensive line. The newly signed Gabe Davis and first-round draftee Brian Thomas Jr. should ease wide receiver Christian Kirk's burden. Running back Travis Etienne Jr. (right) can do it all but needs to finish plays.

DEFENSE

Josh Allen got a huge contract, and he'll line up with free agent signee Arik Armstead, who brings experience, leadership and interior line strength to a lackluster defense. A bottom-dwelling pass defense led to replenishing the secondary by signing Darnell Savage and Ronald Darby.

SPECIAL TEAMS

New return specialist Devin Duvernay will upgrade the squad, and sixth-round draft pick Cam Little from Arkansas brings his launchpad foot as kicker.

SPARK PLUG

"Slot receiver Christian Kirk can heat things up in a hurry," says Davis, who cites "his influence on the team." And analytics site Pro Football Focus calls free safety Andre Cisco a secret superstar. *—MF*

AFC SOUTH

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

Anthony Richardson, the team's No. 1 draft choice, made his NFL debut, giving fans a glimpse of the future and what they hope will be their franchise face for the next 15 years. After four games, the team was 2–2, and there was a sense of optimism and enthusiasm.

LOW POINTS

A season-ending injury to Richardson, during the club's fifth game, deflated hopes. Jonathan Taylor's spotty season, during which he was negotiating for a new contract, hurt the team's red zone offense. At one point, a four-game winning streak had them at 7–5, but they couldn't keep momentum, closing out the season 3–2 and just missing the playoffs.

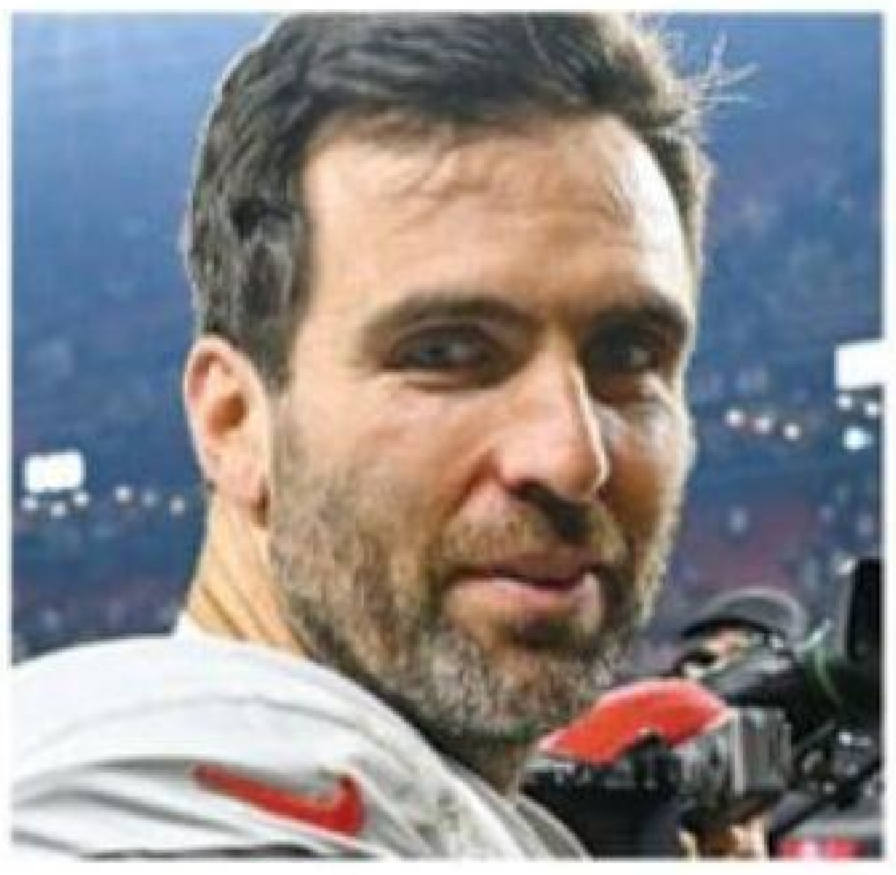
> **"The biggest key is going to be Anthony Richardson and how he plays this year. If he can stay healthy, the Colts are really dangerous."**
>
> **Charles Davis**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Shane Steichen
2023 Record 9–8, tied for second in their division
2023 Home Record 4–5
2023 Away Record 5–3

Passing Leader Gardner Minshew, 490 attempts, 305 completions, 3,305 yards, 15 TDs, 9 interceptions, 34 sacks
Rushing Leader Zack Moss, 183 carries, 794 yards, 5 TDs
Receiving Leader Michael Pittman Jr., 109 receptions, 1,152 yards, 4 TDs
Defense Leaders Zaire Franklin, 179 tackles; Samson Ebukam, 9.5 sacks; Julian Blackmon, 4 interceptions

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL



GAINS

Two good draft prospects: DE Laiatu Latu from UCLA (Round 1) and Texas WR Adonai Mitchell (Round 2); Joe Flacco (above), free agent QB from Cleveland, could be an ideal No. 2; and DT Raekwon Davis signed from Miami.

LOSSES

Last season's QB Gardner Minshew signed a deal with the Raiders; rushing leader Zack Moss signed with the Bengals.

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

For the short time he played before injuries, Anthony Richardson proved his worth, says CBS NFL analyst Charles Davis. In addition, Michael Pittman Jr. (right) leads a list of big receiver targets. Add in Jonathan Taylor, one of the top running backs in the league, and the Colts have the pieces to steamroll over opposing defenses.

DEFENSE

With their pressure defense struggling, drafting Laiatu Latu, the best edge rusher in this year's draft, was a must. And with standouts like defensive end Tyquan Lewis, linebacker Zaire Franklin and strong safety Julian Blackmon, this unit could surprise.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Rigoberto Sanchez reached a career high with 48.3 yards per punt last season. Kicker Matt Gay had an off year statistically, but a lot of that had to do with poor field position.

SPARK PLUG

Indy fans can barely contain their glee about Richardson's return. "Athletically speaking, he's a Cam Newton prototype who changes the complexion of the entire offense," Davis says. *—MF*

LEFT: NICK CAMMETT/DIAMOND IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: MICHAEL ALLIO/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH

ANTHONY RICHARDSON
"There's no one that looks like him in the league," Davis says of the QB, back from injury, "but he didn't get a chance to flash it all."

QUENTON NELSON
The stalwart offensive guard has made the Pro Bowl in each of his six seasons and remains one of the highest-paid OGs in the league.

DEFOREST BUCKNER
Since 2018, this three-time All-Pro DT has never had fewer than 58 tackles and 7 sacks in a season. He is a consistent master at forcing fumbles.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: MICHAEL OWENS/GETTY IMAGES (2); RICH GRAESSLE/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES

JEFFERY SIMMONS Success of the team's defense "all starts with Simmons up front," Davis says of the intimidating DT, who returns from an injury.

ONES TO WATCH

TYJAE SPEARS The second-year running back was a popular double threat in his rookie season, with 453 rushing yards and 385 receiving yards on 52 catches.

RYAN STONEHOUSE His 2023 season was cut short by leg injury, but Stonehouse still matched his NFL record of 53.1 yards per punt from his rookie campaign.

TENNESSEE TITANS

AFC SOUTH

> **If you're a player and you have brand-new coaches, you've got to prove it to the people who don't know you. I really expect everyone to take a jump.**
>
> **Charles Davis**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Brian Callahan
2023 Record 6–11, last place in the division
2023 Home Record 5–4
2023 Away Record 1–7

Passing Leader Will Levis, 255 attempts, 149 completions, 1,808 yards, 8 TDs, 4 interceptions, 44 sacks
Rushing Leader Derrick Henry, 280 carries, 1,167 yards, 12 TDs
Receiving Leader DeAndre Hopkins, 75 receptions, 1,057 yards, 7 TDs
Defense Leaders Azeez Al-Shaair, 163 tackles; Denico Autry, 11.5 sacks; Sean Murphy-Bunting, 2 interceptions

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINT

In Week 14, the Titans miraculously came back from a 27–13 deficit with less than three minutes to play to upset the Dolphins 28–27. Sadly, it only brought their record up to 5–8, but it was a game to savor.

LOW POINT

The line on the team's Week 3 loss to the Cleveland Browns, 27–3, was something awful. The offense finished with less than 100 yards total and a mere 6 first downs. The offensive line proved truly offensive, contributing to the call for reinforcements in the offseason. Among those "reinforcements" was the firing of head coach Mike Vrabel and hiring of Brian Callahan.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

Perhaps the biggest get is on the sidelines—offensive guru Brian Callahan, now in as head coach. They also signed Cowboys RB Tony Pollard and ex–All-Pro WR Calvin Ridley (above) from Jacksonville.

LOSSES

CB Sean Murphy-Bunting signed with the Cardinals, RB Derrick Henry will now play for the Ravens and LB Azeez Al-Shaair went to the Texans.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: JOHNNIE IZQUIERDO/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL OWENS/GETTY IMAGES; PERRY KNOTTS/GETTY IMAGES; NICK CAMMETT/DIAMOND IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID BERDING/GETTY IMAGES

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

Losing running back Derrick Henry hurts. Tyjae Spears and new recruit Tony Pollard combine flash and toughness to soften the blow, although "none of them are Henry," says CBS NFL analyst Charles Davis. "He's a whole different breed of cat, so you divide up responsibilities." And free agent center Lloyd Cushenberry and first-round pick JC Latham will improve the Swiss cheese offensive line.

DEFENSE

The division-winning Texans snatched defensive leader Azeez Al-Shaair and Denico Autry. Star defender Jeffery Simmons needs others to step up and increase pressure, like newly acquired LB Kenneth Murray Jr. Plus, additions L'Jarius Sneed and Chidobe Awuzie will form one of the league's better cornerback groups.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The good news: Punter Ryan Stonehouse led the league in average yards per punt and kicker extraordinaire Nick Folk missed only one field goal last year. The bad news: Everything else, which led to a new special teams coach and hope for improvement.

SPARK PLUG

"You always look at your quarterback and see what he provides," Davis says. Will Levis (left) is "hard-nosed and plays with great toughness," says Davis. And running back Tyjae Spears "ignites things when he touches the football." *—MF*

AFC WEST

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

K.C. earned its second-straight Super Bowl title and third in five seasons with an overtime thriller over the 49ers. QB Patrick Mahomes was named Super Bowl MVP for the third time in his career. And in a move that can only help the NFL's already great ratings, TE Travis Kelce started dating Taylor Swift, and the Swifties started watching in droves.

LOW POINTS

To pick nits, the Chiefs lost three more games in 2023 than they did in '22 and could manage only the No. 3 seed in the AFC. And this past March, WR Rashee Rice sped excessively on a Dallas freeway and got into a six-car crash that injured seven people.

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Andy Reid
2023 Record 11–6, first in AFC West; won Super Bowl LVIII
2023 Home Record 5–4
2023 Away Record 6–2

Passing Leader Patrick Mahomes, 597 attempts, 401 completions, 4,183 yards, 27 TDs, 14 interceptions, 27 sacks
Rushing Leader Isiah Pacheco, 205 carries, 935 yards, 7 TDs
Receiving Leader Travis Kelce, 93 receptions, 984 yards, 5 TDs
Defense Leaders Justin Reid, 95 tackles; Chris Jones and George Karlaftis, 10.5 sacks; L'Jarius Sneed, 2 interceptions

> **"Winning three straight Super Bowls is difficult to do. But the Chiefs have a chance because Patrick Mahomes is their quarterback and Andy Reid is their head coach."**
>
> **Amy Trask**

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

WR Marquise Brown, signed from Arizona; WR Xavier Worthy (above), first-round pick from Texas; QB Carson Wentz, signed from the Rams; TE Irv Smith Jr., signed from the Bengals.

LOSSES

CB L'Jarius Sneed, traded to Tennessee; WR Marquez Valdes-Scantling, released and signed with the Bills; LB Willie Gay signed with the Saints.

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

"We still don't know how the NFL will discipline him," CBS Sports analyst Amy Trask says of WR Rashee Rice, whose legal troubles leave the Chiefs offense with question marks. But Trask loves the blazing speed of rookie WR Xavier Worthy, who holds the NFL Combine record of a 4.21-second 40-yard dash.

DEFENSE

Kansas City's defense was the NFL's second best in both total yards (4,926) and total points (294) last season. "Trading L'Jarius Sneed is a big loss for the defense," Trask says. Sneed had 14 passes defensed in 2023, tied for ninth in the league, and the secondary—with safety Justin Reid (below) and CB Trent McDuffie—will miss his instinct for the ball.

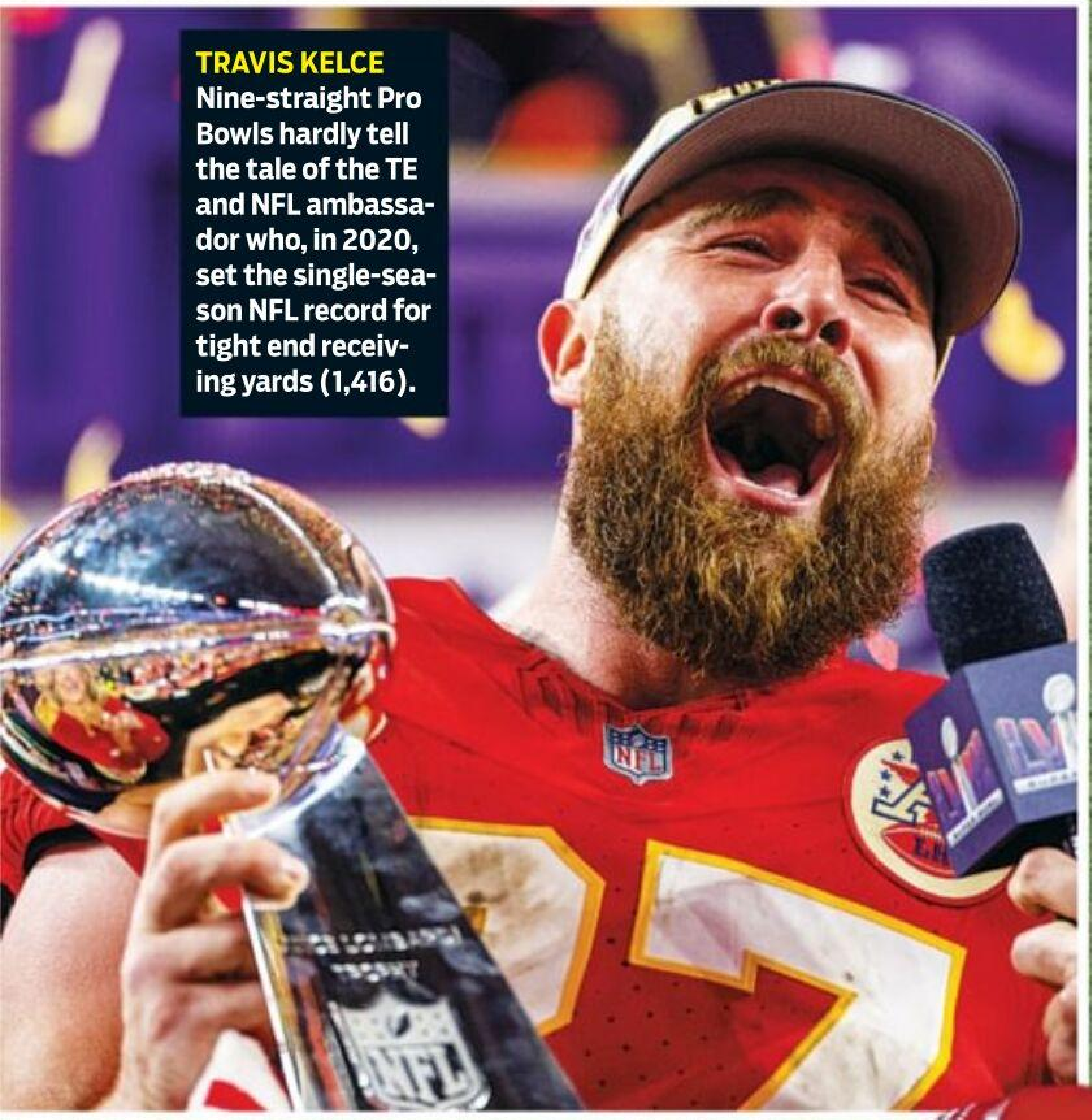
SPECIAL TEAMS

Harrison Butker generated lots of talk with his commencement speech—and with his kicking. He nailed four field goals in Super Bowl LVIII, including a record 57-yarder and a 29-yarder with three seconds left in the game to send it to overtime.

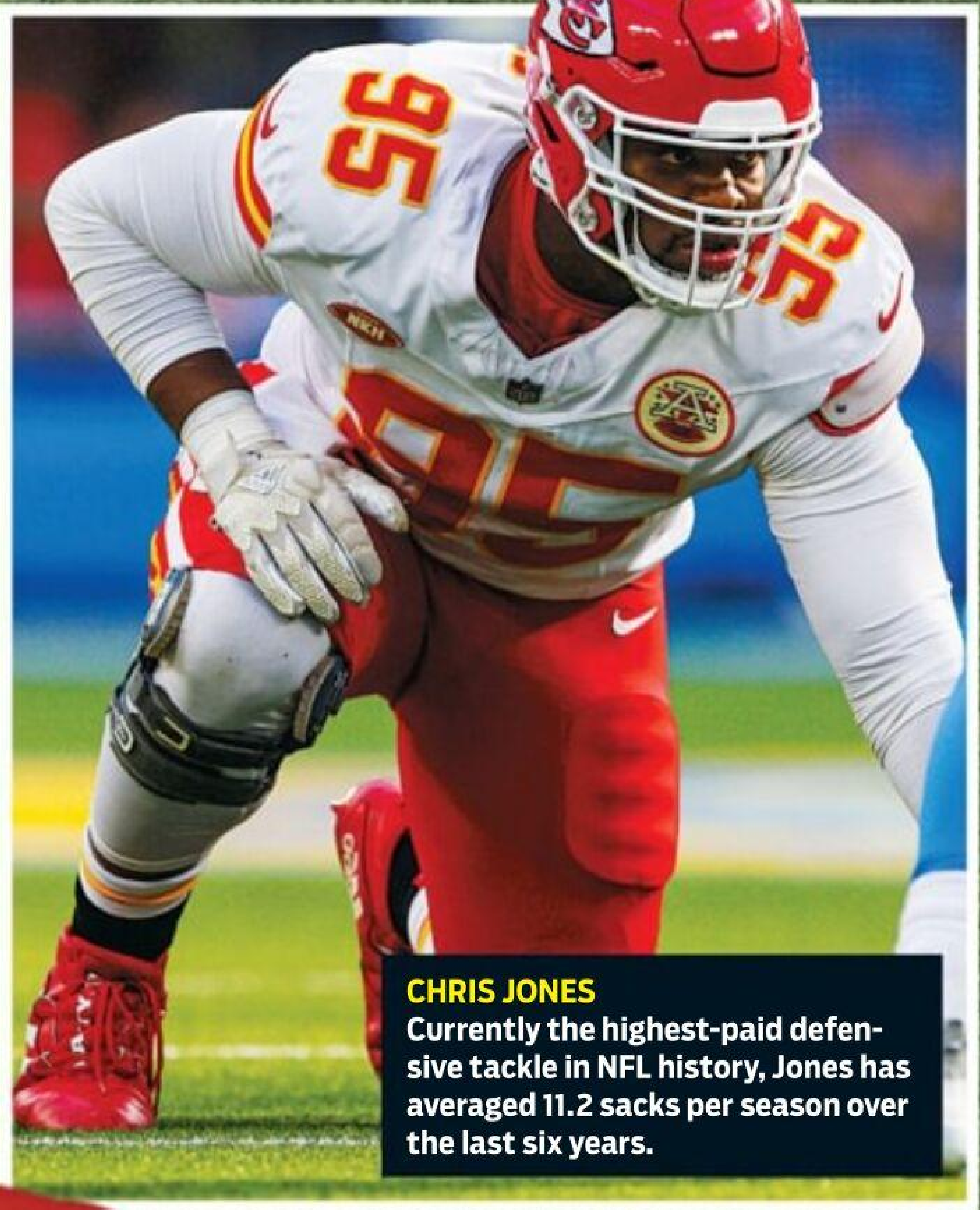
SPARK PLUG

DT Chris Jones wreaks havoc on offenses. He not only got to the quarterback, but also his 72 sack yards last year tilted the field in the Chiefs' favor. Jones also blew up running plays with a team-high 13 tackles for loss. *—Ryan A. Berenz*

LEFT: MICHAEL HICKEY/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: DUSTIN BRADFORD/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES



TRAVIS KELCE
Nine-straight Pro Bowls hardly tell the tale of the TE and NFL ambassador who, in 2020, set the single-season NFL record for tight end receiving yards (1,416).



CHRIS JONES
Currently the highest-paid defensive tackle in NFL history, Jones has averaged 11.2 sacks per season over the last six years.

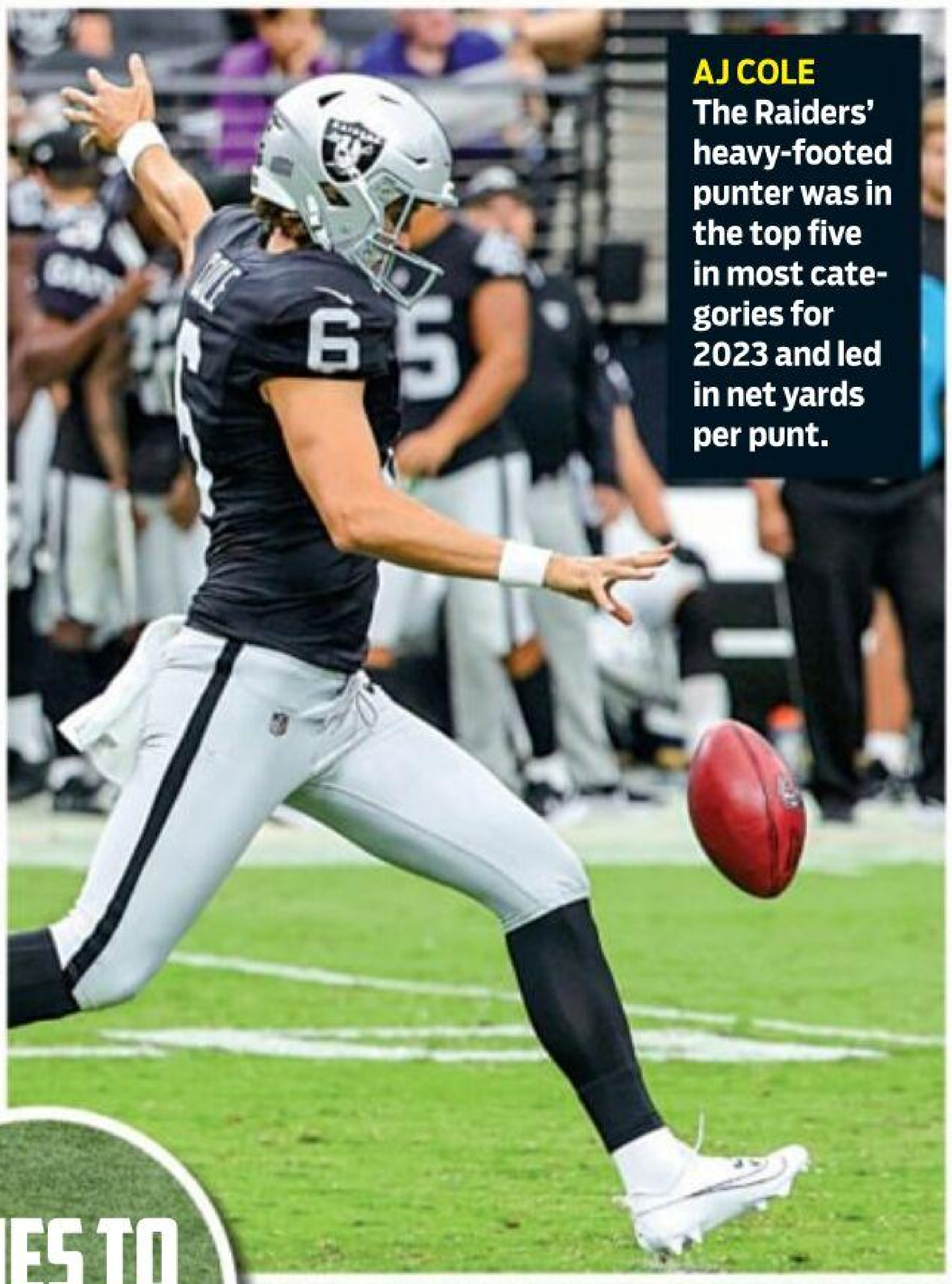
PATRICK MAHOMES
Three-time Super Bowl MVP, two-time league MVP, the Chiefs' quarterback is elusive in and out of the pocket and at the top of his game.

ONES TO WATCH

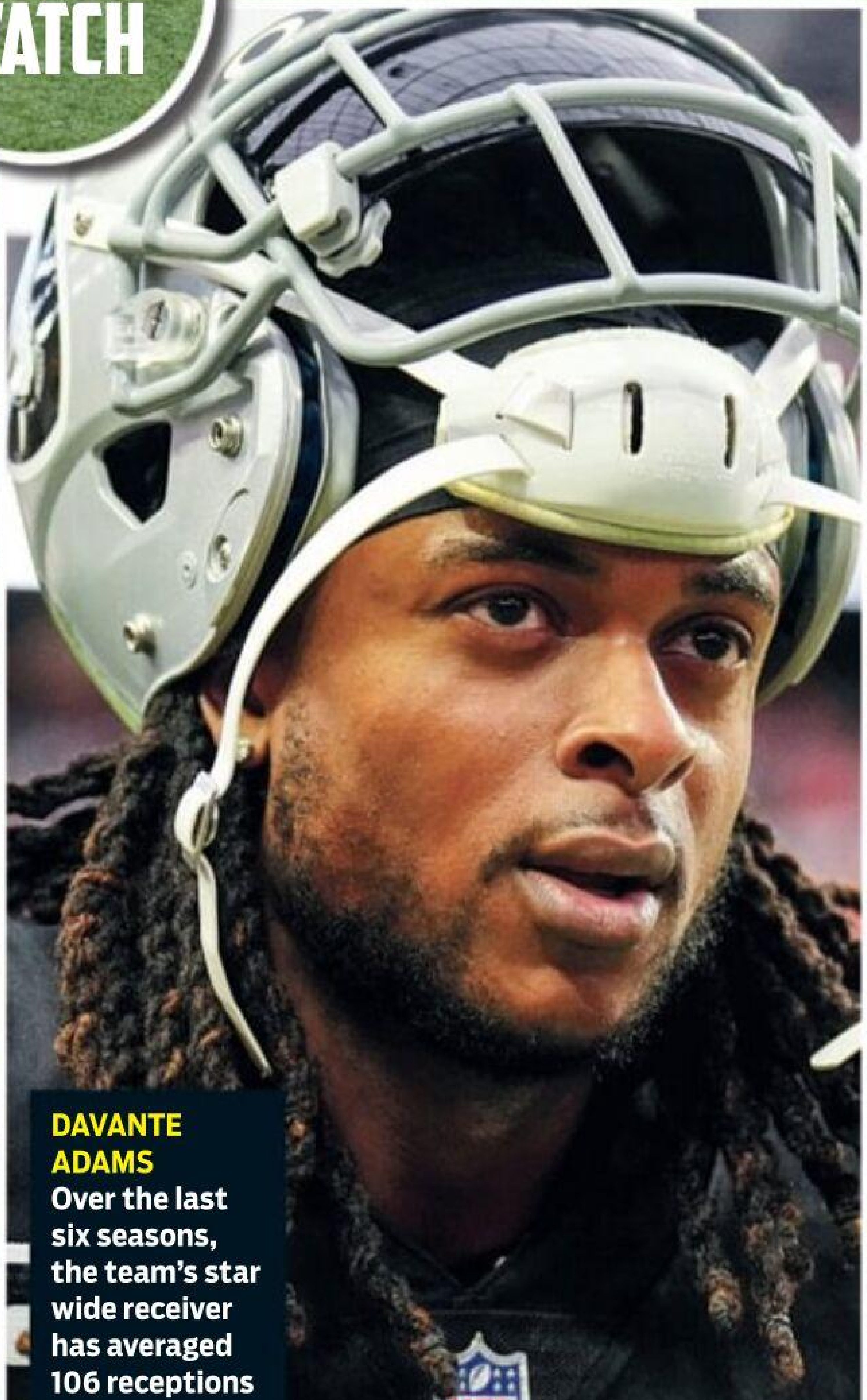
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MICHAEL OWENS/GETTY IMAGES; RIC TAPIA/GETTY IMAGES; AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH

MAXX CROSBY
The three-time Pro Bowl DE, who begins his sixth season with the team, tied for first in tackles for a loss, with 23.



AJ COLE
The Raiders' heavy-footed punter was in the top five in most categories for 2023 and led in net yards per punt.



DAVANTE ADAMS
Over the last six seasons, the team's star wide receiver has averaged 106 receptions per year.

LAS VEGAS RAIDERS

AFC WEST

> **When Antonio Pierce took over as head coach, he energized the team. I believe they were playing like Raiders should play. Presumably, he brings that same intensity now.**
>
> Amy Trask

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Antonio Pierce
2023 Record 8–9, tied for second in the division
Home Record 6–3
Away Record 2–6

Passing Leader Aidan O'Connell, 343 attempts, 213 completions, 2,218 yards, 12 TDs, 7 interceptions, 24 sacks
Rushing Leader Josh Jacobs, 233 rushes, 805 yards, 6 TDs
Receiving Leader Davante Adams, 103 receptions, 1,144 yards, 8 TDs
Defense Leaders Robert Spillane, 148 tackles; Maxx Crosby, 14.5 sacks; Robert Spillane and Tre'von Moehrig, 3 interceptions each

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

Interim head coach Antonio Pierce's debut was an impressive 30–6 win over the New York Giants in Week 9, which was also the first start for rookie QB Aidan O'Connell. The Raiders won three of their last four games, including a surprising 20–14 Christmas Day upset of the Kansas City Chiefs on the road.

LOW POINTS

With the Raiders sitting at 3–5 after a 26–14 loss to the Detroit Lions, head coach Josh McDaniels and general manager David Ziegler were fired. In the lowest-scoring NFL game in 16 years, the Raiders lost to the Minnesota Vikings 3–0 in Week 14.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

QB Gardner Minshew II, signed from the Colts; TE Brock Bowers (above), first-round pick from Georgia; guard Jackson Powers-Johnson, second-round pick from Oregon; RB Alexander Mattison signed after being released by the Vikings.

LOSSES

RB Josh Jacobs signed with Green Bay; QB Jimmy Garoppolo, released, signed with the Rams; WR Hunter Renfrow released.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: RYAN KANG/GETTY IMAGES; ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES; TODD ROSENBERG/GETTY IMAGES; RYAN KANG/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS UNGER/GETTY IMAGES

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

A battle for starting QB between Aidan O'Connell and former Colt Gardner Minshew II will be decided in training camp. RB Zamir White has big shoes to fill with Josh Jacobs' departure. "The Raiders did bring in additional running back help, but I was disappointed in the loss of Jacobs," says CBS Sports analyst—and former Raiders CEO—Amy Trask.

DEFENSE

The interior is solid with LB Robert Spillane (right), DT Christian Wilkins and Pro Bowl DE Maxx Crosby. The Raiders didn't do much to improve the secondary, especially at the corners, so this could be just an average unit.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Daniel Carlson was only 1–3 in field goals attempted from 50-plus yards. Pro Bowler AJ Cole broke the franchise record for longest punt with an 83-yarder in December 2023.

SPARK PLUG

Head coach Antonio Pierce understands the Raider Way. "There was an energy and a passion on the field that was palpable when watching the games," Trask says of his interim stint during the second half of last year. "He brought that Raider passion back." *—RB*

AFC WEST

DENVER BRONCOS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

After a 1–5 start, the Broncos strung together five straight wins against quality opponents, including a 24–9 home victory in Week 8 that snapped a 16-game losing streak to the division-leading Chiefs. The Broncos scored 17 unanswered points in the fourth quarter to beat the Chicago Bears 31–28 in Week 4.

LOW POINTS

The Miami Dolphins sent the Broncos to 0–3 with a 70–20 drubbing, the most points scored by a team in a single game since 1966. The Russell Wilson era ended with the QB benched for the final two games. Denver had its seventh straight losing season and eighth straight without a playoff appearance.

STAT LEADERS

Head coach Sean Payton
2023 record 8–9, tied for second in the division
2023 home record 5–4
2023 away record 3–5

Passing leader Russell Wilson, 447 attempts, 297 completions, 3,070 yards, 26 TDs, 8 interceptions, 45 sacks
Rushing leader Javonte Williams, 217 rushes, 774 yards, 3 TDs
Receiving leader Courtland Sutton, 59 receptions, 772 yards, 10 TDs
Defense leaders Alex Singleton, 177 tackles; Jonathon Cooper, 8.5 sacks; Justin Simmons, 3 interceptions

> **“Signing Russell Wilson was a costly decision by the Broncos. I understand ownership is tremendously wealthy, but boy, oh boy, they owe Wilson a lot of money.”**
>
> **Amy Trask**

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

QB Bo Nix (above), first-round draft pick from Oregon; WR Josh Reynolds, signed from Lions; WR Troy Franklin, fourth-round pick from Oregon; LB Jonah Elliss, third-round pick from Utah; Levi Wallace, CB, signed from Pittsburgh.

LOSSES

QB Russell Wilson, released, signed with Pittsburgh; center Lloyd Cushenberry III, signed with Tennessee; DT Jonathan Harris (Miami).

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

The future is 12th-overall draft pick Bo Nix, who had an NCAA record 61 QB starts in college. “He may come in far more ready to play than many rookies. But the fact is the NFL is very different than college football,” says CBS Sports analyst Amy Trask. He’ll have some help from WR Troy Franklin (another Oregon rookie).

DEFENSE

CB Pat Surtain II is a star on a weak defensive secondary. The defense gave up 370.8 total yards per game (fourth worst in the NFL) and 137.1 rushing yards per game (third worst).

SPECIAL TEAMS

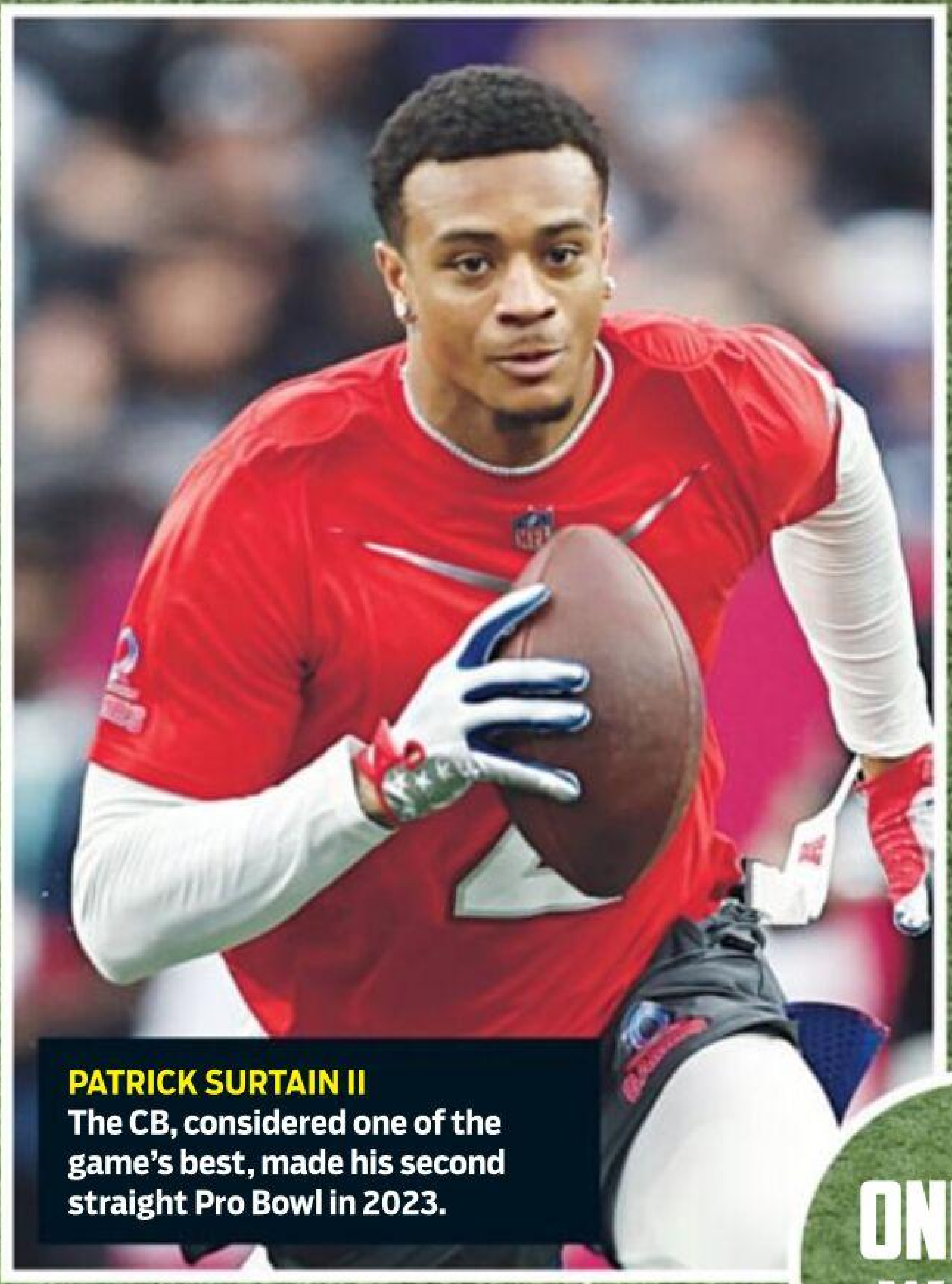
The punt team combined for a league-best 16.3 yards per return in 2023. Kicker Wil Lutz was successful on 30 of 34 field goal attempts and 3–5 in tries of 50-plus yards.

SPARK PLUG

RB Jaleel McLaughlin has big-play potential, with an average of 5.4 yards per carry and four runs of 20-plus yards in his rookie year. He’s a game-changer who should see an expanded role in the running and passing game alongside rushing leader RB Javonte Williams (left). *—RAB*

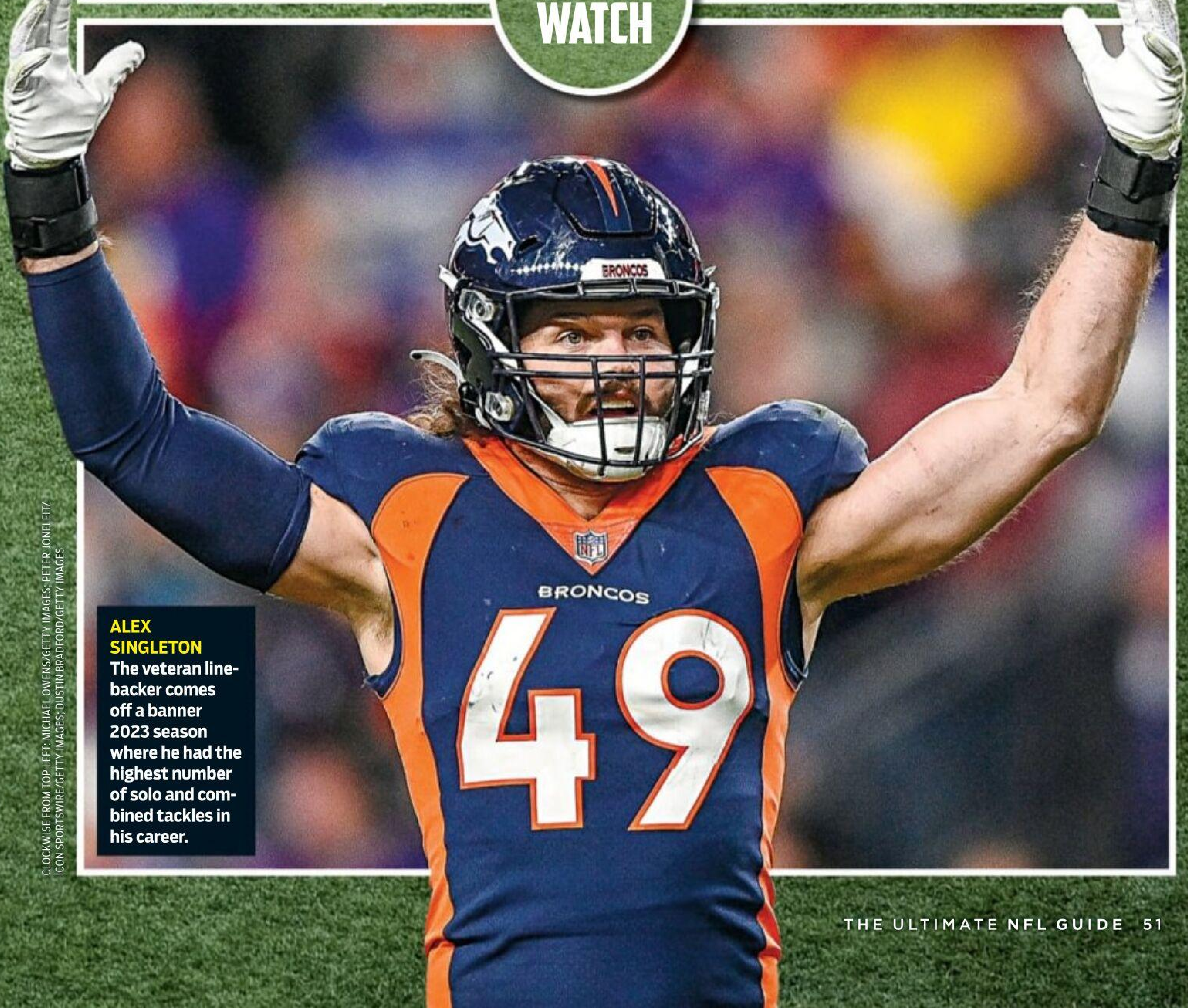
LEFT: KEVIN SABITUS/GETTY IMAGE. RIGHT: CANDICE WARD/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH



PATRICK SURTAIN II
The CB, considered one of the game's best, made his second straight Pro Bowl in 2023.

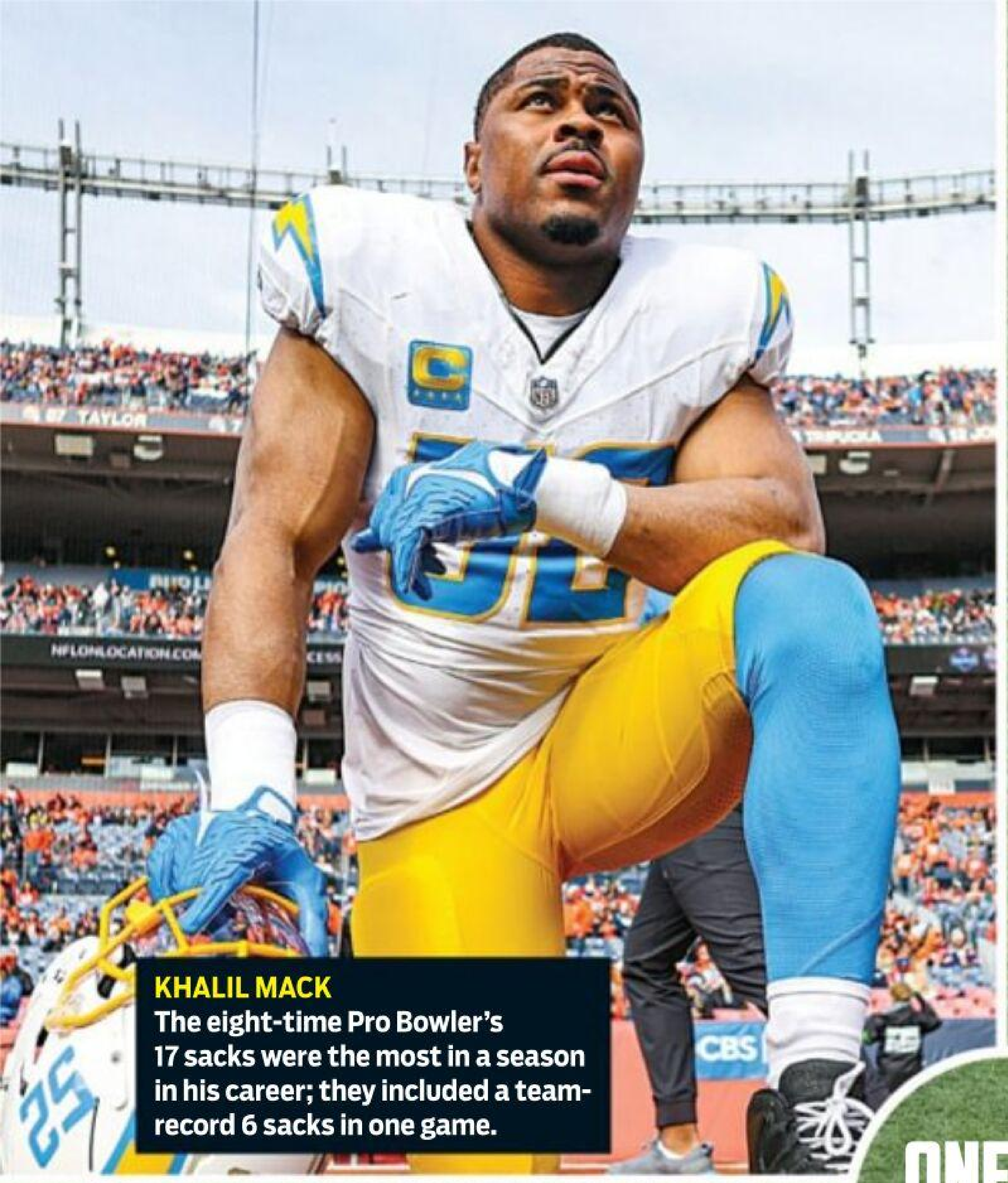
COURTLAND SUTTON
The WR led the team in most receiving categories last year, and his 10 TDs were the most he's ever posted in a season in his six-year career.



ALEX SINGLETON
The veteran linebacker comes off a banner 2023 season where he had the highest number of solo and combined tackles in his career.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MICHAEL OWENS/GETTY IMAGES; PETER JONELEIT/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES; DUSTIN BRADFORD/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH



KHALIL MACK
The eight-time Pro Bowler's 17 sacks were the most in a season in his career; they included a team-record 6 sacks in one game.

DERIUS DAVIS
The NFL Players Association named the WR the best punt returner in the league, thanks to his 16-yards-per average.

JUSTIN HERBERT
The team's franchise quarterback looks to pick up where he left off after recovering from a broken finger he suffered late last season.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: PERRY KNOTTS/GETTY IMAGES; DUSTIN BRADFORD/GETTY IMAGES; J. SCHABEN/LOS ANGELES TIMES/GETTY IMAGES

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS

AFC WEST

> “Jim Harbaugh is going to do for Justin Herbert what no Chargers coach has yet done for Justin Herbert, which is best position him to be his best.”
>
> **Amy Trask**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Jim Harbaugh
2023 Record 5–12, last in the division
2023 Home Record 2–7
2023 Away Record 3–5

Passing Leader Justin Herbert, 456 attempts, 297 completions, 3,134 yards, 20 TDs, 7 interceptions, 29 sacks
Rushing Leader Austin Ekeler, 179 carries, 628 yards, 5 TDs
Receiving Leader Keenan Allen, 108 receptions, 1,243 yards, 7 TDs
Defense Leaders Derwin James Jr., 125 tackles; Khalil Mack, 17 sacks; Alohi Gilman and Asante Samuel Jr., 2 interceptions each

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

RB Austin Ekeler ran for two touchdowns and safety Alohi Gilman had a key fumble recovery in a convincing 27–6 Week 9 win over the New York Jets. The defense pitched a shutout, and two Cameron Dicker field goals were all the Chargers needed to beat the Patriots in a hard-fought 6–0 Week 13 win on the road.

LOW POINTS

The Chargers lost eight of their last nine games—including a 63–21 Week 15 beatdown by the Las Vegas Raiders—and head coach Brandon Staley was fired after that awful defeat. Topping things off, QB Justin Herbert went out for the season with a broken finger in a Week 14 loss to the Broncos.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

RB Gus Edwards signed from the Ravens; OT Joe Alt (above), first-round pick from Notre Dame; WR Ladd McConkey, second-round pick from Georgia; Jim Harbaugh, who led Michigan to the 2024 NCAA Championship, is now head coach.

LOSSES

WR Keenan Allen, traded to the Chicago Bears; RB Austin Ekeler and CB Michael Davis, both signed with Washington.

LEFT: MICHAEL HICKEY/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: DUSTIN BRADFORD/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

The return of QB Justin Herbert from injury is an instant boost. A tough, physical offensive line that includes onetime Pro Bowl OT Rashawn Slater (right) and a ground game led by RB Gus Edwards will take the pressure off.

DEFENSE

LBs Khalil Mack and Joey Bosa took pay cuts to stay with the team. New defensive coordinator Jesse Minter needs to turn around a woeful defense that was 28th in total yards per game allowed and 30th in passing yards per game allowed.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Cameron Dicker is a stellar young kicker who nailed 31 of 33 field goal attempts in 2023, including 7 of 9 from 50-plus yards. The Chargers hope to see a great deal less of J.K. Scott, who booted 75 punts last season.

SPARK PLUG

It might be new senior offensive assistant—and former Bears head coach—Marc Trestman. Harbaugh adding him to the squad “was significant; Trestman is brilliant,” says CBS Sports analyst Amy Trask. “I think Marc is going to help that team tremendously.” *—RAB*

HOW TO WATCH EVERY

ALL TIMES ARE EASTERN

The 2024 season begins with the Chiefs hosting the Ravens in the NFL Kickoff Game, a rematch of last season's AFC Championship Game. After that, the league boasts amazing firsts. On September 6, the Packers face the Eagles at Corinthians Arena in São Paulo, Brazil, the first NFL regular season game played in South America. We'll also see two games on Christmas...the first NFL games on Netflix. It's all here in the complete schedule.

WEEK 1

Thursday, Sept. 5

8:20 p.m. on NBC

Baltimore Ravens at Kansas City Chiefs

Friday, Sept. 6

8:15 p.m. on Peacock

Green Bay Packers vs. Philadelphia Eagles
(in São Paulo, Brazil)

Sunday, Sept. 8

1 p.m. on Fox

Pittsburgh Steelers at Atlanta Falcons
Tennessee Titans at Chicago Bears
Carolina Panthers at New Orleans Saints
Minnesota Vikings at New York Giants

1 p.m. on CBS

Arizona Cardinals at Buffalo Bills
New England Patriots at Cincinnati Bengals
Houston Texans at Indianapolis Colts
Jacksonville Jaguars at Miami Dolphins

4:05 p.m. on CBS

Las Vegas Raiders at Los Angeles Chargers
Denver Broncos at Seattle Seahawks

4:25 p.m. on Fox

Dallas Cowboys at Cleveland Browns
Washington Commanders at Tampa Bay Buccaneers

8:20 p.m. on NBC

Los Angeles Rams at Detroit Lions

Monday, Sept. 9

8:15 p.m. on ESPN and ABC

New York Jets at San Francisco 49ers

WEEK 2

Thursday, Sept. 12

8:15 p.m. on Prime Video

Buffalo Bills at Miami Dolphins

Sunday, Sept. 15

1 p.m. on CBS

Las Vegas Raiders at Baltimore Ravens
Los Angeles Chargers at Carolina Panthers
Cleveland Browns at Jacksonville Jaguars

Week 1 Spotlight
NEW YORK JETS AT SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS
Aaron Rodgers looks to stay on his feet on *Monday Night Football*

San Francisco 49ers at Minnesota Vikings
New York Jets at Tennessee Titans
Seattle Seahawks at New England Patriots

1 p.m. on Fox

New Orleans Saints at Dallas Cowboys
Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Detroit Lions
Indianapolis Colts at Green Bay Packers
New York Giants at Washington Commanders

4:05 p.m. on Fox

Los Angeles Rams at Arizona Cardinals

4:25 p.m. on CBS

Pittsburgh Steelers at Denver Broncos
Cincinnati Bengals at Kansas City Chiefs

8:20 p.m. on NBC

Chicago Bears at Houston Texans

Monday, Sept. 16

8:15 p.m. on ESPN

Atlanta Falcons at Philadelphia Eagles

WEEK 3

Thursday, Sept. 19

8:15 p.m. on Prime Video

New England Patriots at New York Jets

RYAN KANG/GETTY IMAGES

GAME OF THE SEASON

Sunday, Sept. 22
1 p.m. on CBS
Chicago Bears at Indianapolis Colts
Houston Texans at Minnesota Vikings
Los Angeles Chargers at Pittsburgh Steelers

1 p.m. on Fox
New York Giants at Cleveland Browns
Philadelphia Eagles at New Orleans Saints
Denver Broncos at Tampa Bay Buccaneers
Green Bay Packers at Tennessee Titans

4:05 p.m. on CBS
Carolina Panthers at Las Vegas Raiders
Miami Dolphins at Seattle Seahawks

4:25 p.m. on Fox
Detroit Lions at Arizona Cardinals
Baltimore Ravens at Dallas Cowboys
San Francisco 49ers at Los Angeles Rams

8:20 p.m. on NBC
Kansas City Chiefs at Atlanta Falcons

Monday, Sept. 23
7:30 p.m. on ESPN
Jacksonville Jaguars at Buffalo Bills

8:15 p.m. on ABC
Washington Commanders at Cincinnati Bengals

WEEK 4
Thursday, Sept. 26
8:15 p.m. on Prime Video
Dallas Cowboys at New York Giants

Sunday, Sept. 29
1 p.m. on CBS
Minnesota Vikings at Green Bay Packers
Jacksonville Jaguars at Houston Texans
Pittsburgh Steelers at Indianapolis Colts
Denver Broncos at New York Jets

1 p.m. on Fox
New Orleans Saints at Atlanta Falcons
Cincinnati Bengals at Carolina Panthers
Los Angeles Rams at Chicago Bears
Philadelphia Eagles at Tampa Bay Buccaneers

4:05 p.m. on Fox
Washington Commanders at Arizona Cardinals
New England Patriots at San Francisco 49ers

4:25 p.m. on CBS
Kansas City Chiefs at Los Angeles Chargers
Cleveland Browns at Las Vegas Raiders

8:20 p.m. on NBC
Buffalo Bills at Baltimore Ravens

Monday, Sept. 30
7:30 p.m. on ESPN
Tennessee Titans at Miami Dolphins

8:15 p.m. on ABC
Seattle Seahawks at Detroit Lions

WEEK 5
Thursday, Oct. 3
8:15 p.m. on Prime Video
Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Atlanta Falcons

Sunday, Oct. 6
9:30 a.m. on NFL Network
New York Jets vs. Minnesota Vikings
(in London)

1 p.m. on CBS
Baltimore Ravens at Cincinnati Bengals
Buffalo Bills at Houston Texans
Indianapolis Colts at Jacksonville Jaguars

1 p.m. on Fox
Carolina Panthers at Chicago Bears
Miami Dolphins at New England Patriots
Cleveland Browns at Washington Commanders

4:05 p.m. on Fox
Arizona Cardinals at San Francisco 49ers
Las Vegas Raiders at Denver Broncos

4:25 p.m. on CBS
Green Bay Packers at Los Angeles Rams
New York Giants at Seattle Seahawks

8:20 p.m. on NBC*
Dallas Cowboys at Pittsburgh Steelers

Monday, Oct. 7
8:15 p.m. on ESPN
New Orleans Saints at Kansas City Chiefs

WEEK 6
Thursday, Oct. 10
8:15 p.m. on Prime Video
San Francisco 49ers at Seattle Seahawks

Sunday, Oct. 13
9:30 a.m. on NFL Network
Jacksonville Jaguars vs. Chicago Bears
(in London)

1 p.m. on CBS
Washington Commanders at Baltimore Ravens
Houston Texans at New England Patriots
Indianapolis Colts at Tennessee Titans

1 p.m. on Fox
Arizona Cardinals at Green Bay Packers
Tampa Bay Buccaneers at New Orleans Saints
Cleveland Browns at Philadelphia Eagles

4:05 p.m. on CBS
Los Angeles Chargers at Denver Broncos
Pittsburgh Steelers at Las Vegas Raiders

4:25 p.m. on Fox
Atlanta Falcons at Carolina Panthers
Detroit Lions at Dallas Cowboys

8:20 p.m. on NBC*
Cincinnati Bengals at New York Giants

Monday, Oct. 14
8:15 p.m. on ESPN
Buffalo Bills at New York Jets

WEEK 7
Thursday, Oct. 17
8:15 p.m. on Prime Video
Denver Broncos at New Orleans Saints

Sunday, Oct. 20
9:30 a.m. on NFL Network
New England Patriots vs. Jacksonville Jaguars
(in London) ▶

*Indicates flexible schedule
Dates and times subject to change

HOW TO WATCH EVERY GAME OF THE SEASON

ALL TIMES ARE EASTERN

WEEK 7 (CONTINUED)

1 p.m. on CBS

Tennessee Titans at Buffalo Bills
Cincinnati Bengals at Cleveland Browns
Houston Texans at Green Bay Packers

1 p.m. on Fox

Seattle Seahawks at Atlanta Falcons
Miami Dolphins at Indianapolis Colts
Detroit Lions at Minnesota Vikings
Philadelphia Eagles at New York Giants

4:05 p.m. on CBS

Las Vegas Raiders at Los Angeles Rams
Carolina Panthers at Washington Commanders

4:25 p.m. on Fox

Kansas City Chiefs at San Francisco 49ers

8:20 p.m. on NBC*

New York Jets at Pittsburgh Steelers

Monday, Oct. 21

8:15 p.m. on ESPN

Baltimore Ravens at Tampa Bay Buccaneers

9 p.m. on ESPN+

Los Angeles Chargers at Arizona Cardinals

WEEK 8

Thursday, Oct. 24

8:15 p.m. on Prime Video

Minnesota Vikings at Los Angeles Rams

Sunday, Oct. 27

1 p.m. on CBS

Baltimore Ravens at Cleveland Browns
Indianapolis Colts at Houston Texans
New York Jets at New England Patriots
Chicago Bears at Washington Commanders

1 p.m. on Fox

Tennessee Titans at Detroit Lions
Green Bay Packers at Jacksonville Jaguars
Arizona Cardinals at Miami Dolphins
Atlanta Falcons at Tampa Bay Buccaneers

4:05 p.m. on Fox

New Orleans Saints at Los Angeles Chargers
Buffalo Bills at Seattle Seahawks

4:25 p.m. on CBS

Philadelphia Eagles at Cincinnati Bengals

Week 7 Spotlight
KANSAS CITY CHIEFS AT SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS
Quarterback Brock Purdy has home-field advantage in this rematch of the Super Bowl

Carolina Panthers at Denver Broncos
Kansas City Chiefs at Las Vegas Raiders

8:20 p.m. on NBC*

Dallas Cowboys at San Francisco 49ers

Monday, Oct. 28

8:15 p.m. on ESPN and ABC

New York Giants at Pittsburgh Steelers

WEEK 9

Thursday, Oct. 31

8:15 p.m. on Prime Video

Houston Texans at New York Jets

Sunday, Nov. 3

1 p.m. on CBS

Denver Broncos at Baltimore Ravens
Miami Dolphins at Buffalo Bills
New Orleans Saints at Carolina Panthers
Los Angeles Chargers at Cleveland Browns
Indianapolis Colts at Minnesota Vikings

1 p.m. on Fox

Dallas Cowboys at Atlanta Falcons
Las Vegas Raiders at Cincinnati Bengals
Washington Commanders at New York Giants
New England Patriots at Tennessee Titans

4:05 p.m. on CBS

Chicago Bears at Arizona Cardinals

4:25 p.m. on Fox

Detroit Lions at Green Bay Packers

Los Angeles Rams at Seattle Seahawks

8:20 p.m. on NBC*

Jacksonville Jaguars at Philadelphia Eagles

Monday, Nov. 4

8:15 p.m. on ESPN

Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Kansas City Chiefs

WEEK 10

Thursday, Nov. 7

8:15 p.m. on Prime Video

Cincinnati Bengals at Baltimore Ravens

Sunday, Nov. 10

9:30 a.m. on NFL Network

New York Giants vs. Carolina Panthers
(in Munich)

1 p.m. on CBS

Buffalo Bills at Indianapolis Colts
Denver Broncos at Kansas City Chiefs
Pittsburgh Steelers at Washington Commanders

1 p.m. on Fox

New England Patriots at Chicago Bears
Minnesota Vikings at Jacksonville Jaguars
Atlanta Falcons at New Orleans Saints
San Francisco 49ers at Tampa Bay Buccaneers

4:05 p.m. on Fox

Tennessee Titans at Los Angeles Chargers

4:25 p.m. on CBS

New York Jets at Arizona Cardinals
Philadelphia Eagles at Dallas Cowboys

8:20 p.m. on NBC*

Detroit Lions at Houston Texans

Monday, Nov. 11

8:15 p.m. on ESPN

Miami Dolphins at Los Angeles Rams

WEEK 11

Thursday, Nov. 14

8:15 p.m. on Prime Video

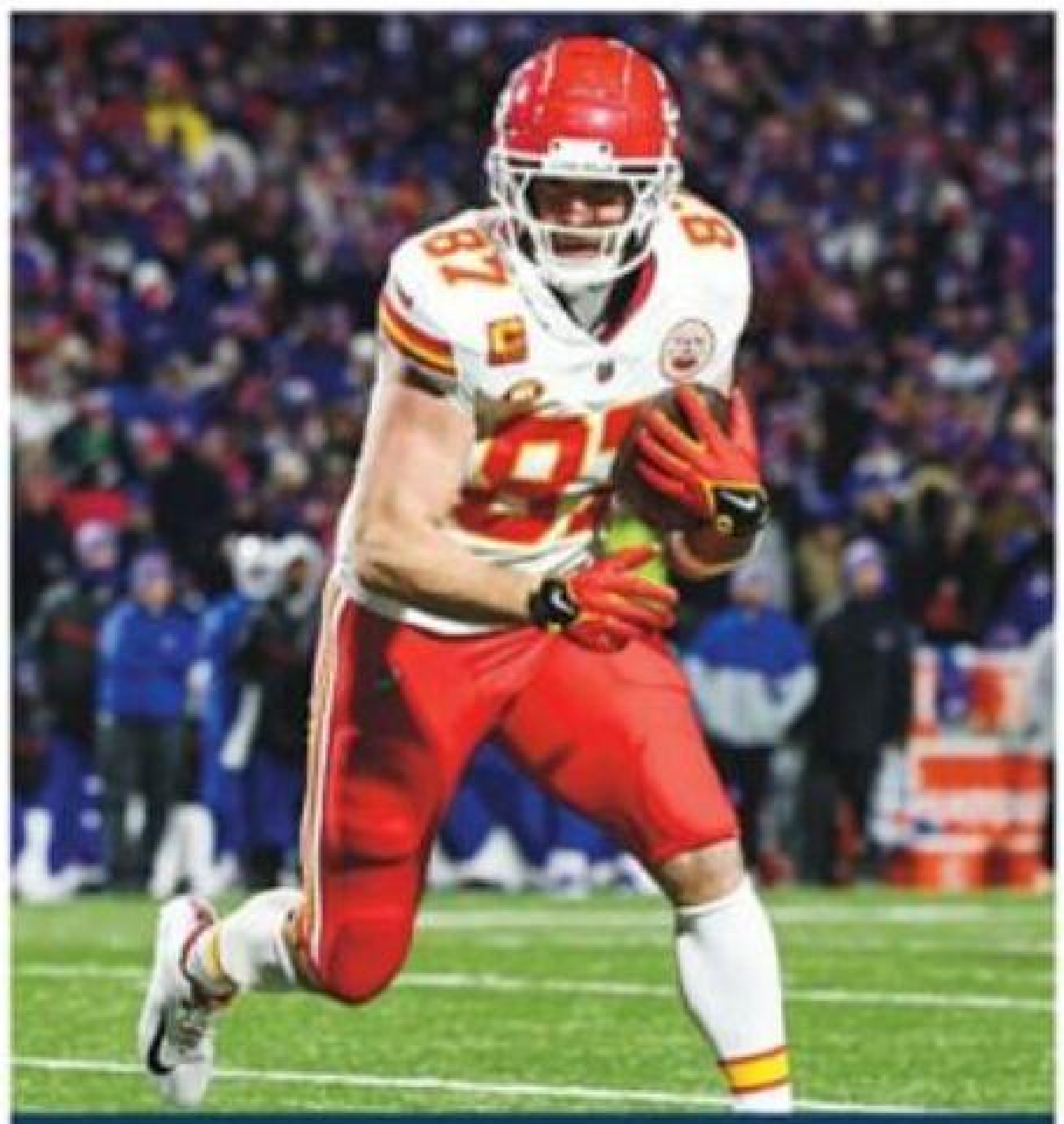
Washington Commanders at Philadelphia Eagles

Sunday, Nov. 17

1 p.m. on CBS

Jacksonville Jaguars at Detroit Lions

TOP: FOCUS ON SPORT/GETTY IMAGES. BOTTOM: PERRY KNOTTS/GETTY IMAGES



Week 11 Spotlight
KANSAS CITY CHIEFS AT BUFFALO BILLS
Travis Kelce broke the Bills' hearts in the playoffs last year; Buffalo is back for revenge.

EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES

Las Vegas Raiders at Miami Dolphins
Baltimore Ravens at Pittsburgh Steelers
Minnesota Vikings at Tennessee Titans

1 p.m. on Fox
Green Bay Packers at Chicago Bears
Los Angeles Rams at New England Patriots
Cleveland Browns at New Orleans Saints

4:05 p.m. on Fox
Atlanta Falcons at Denver Broncos
Seattle Seahawks at San Francisco 49ers

4:25 p.m. on CBS
Kansas City Chiefs at Buffalo Bills
Cincinnati Bengals at Los Angeles Chargers

8:20 p.m. on NBC*
Indianapolis Colts at New York Jets

Monday, Nov. 18
8:15 p.m. on ESPN
Houston Texans at Dallas Cowboys

Week 12
Thursday, Nov. 21
8:15 p.m. on Prime Video
Pittsburgh Steelers at Cleveland Browns

Sunday, Nov. 24
1 p.m. on CBS
Kansas City Chiefs at Carolina Panthers
Tennessee Titans at Houston Texans
New England Patriots at Miami Dolphins
Tampa Bay Buccaneers at New York Giants

1 p.m. on Fox
Minnesota Vikings at Chicago Bears
Detroit Lions at Indianapolis Colts
Dallas Cowboys at Washington Commanders

4:05 p.m. on CBS
Denver Broncos at Las Vegas Raiders

4:25 p.m. on Fox
San Francisco 49ers at Green Bay Packers
Arizona Cardinals at Seattle Seahawks

8:20 p.m. on NBC*
Philadelphia Eagles at Los Angeles Rams

Monday, Nov. 25
8:15 p.m. on ESPN*
Baltimore Ravens at Los Angeles Chargers

WEEK 13
Thursday, Nov. 28 (Thanksgiving)
12:30 p.m. on CBS
Chicago Bears at Detroit Lions

4:30 p.m. on Fox
New York Giants at Dallas Cowboys

8:20 p.m. on NBC
Miami Dolphins at Green Bay Packers

Friday, Nov. 29 (Black Friday)
3 p.m. on Prime Video
Las Vegas Raiders at Kansas City Chiefs

Sunday, Dec. 1
1 p.m. on CBS
Indianapolis Colts at New England Patriots
Los Angeles Chargers at Atlanta Falcons
Pittsburgh Steelers at Cincinnati Bengals
Tennessee Titans at Washington Commanders

1 p.m. on Fox
Houston Texans at Jacksonville Jaguars
Arizona Cardinals at Minnesota Vikings
Seattle Seahawks at New York Jets

4:05 p.m. on Fox
Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Carolina Panthers
Los Angeles Rams at New Orleans Saints
4:25 p.m. on CBS
Philadelphia Eagles at Baltimore Ravens

8:20 p.m. on NBC*
San Francisco 49ers at Buffalo Bills

Monday, Dec. 2
8:15 p.m. on ESPN*
Cleveland Browns at Denver Broncos

WEEK 14
Thursday, Dec. 5
8:15 p.m. on Prime Video*
Green Bay Packers at Detroit Lions

Sunday, Dec. 8
1 p.m. on CBS
New York Jets at Miami Dolphins
Las Vegas Raiders at Tampa Bay Buccaneers
Jacksonville Jaguars at Tennessee Titans
Cleveland Browns at Pittsburgh Steelers

1 p.m. on Fox
Atlanta Falcons at Minnesota Vikings
New Orleans Saints at New York Giants
Carolina Panthers at Philadelphia Eagles

4:05 p.m. on CBS
Seattle Seahawks at Arizona Cardinals

4:25 p.m. on Fox
Buffalo Bills at Los Angeles Rams
Chicago Bears at San Francisco 49ers

8:20 p.m. on NBC*
Los Angeles Chargers at Kansas City Chiefs

Monday, Dec. 9
8:15 p.m. on ESPN and ABC*
Cincinnati Bengals at Dallas Cowboys

WEEK 15
Thursday, Dec. 12
8:15 p.m. on Prime Video*
Los Angeles Rams at San Francisco 49ers

Sunday, Dec. 15
1 p.m. on CBS
Kansas City Chiefs at Cleveland Browns
Miami Dolphins at Houston Texans
Baltimore Ravens at New York Giants

1 p.m. on Fox
Dallas Cowboys at Carolina Panthers

▶

*Indicates flexible schedule
Dates and times subject to change

HOW TO WATCH EVERY GAME OF THE SEASON

ALL TIMES ARE EASTERN

WEEK 15 (CONTINUED)

New York Jets at Jacksonville Jaguars
Washington Commanders at New Orleans Saints
Cincinnati Bengals at Tennessee Titans

4:25 p.m. on CBS
New England Patriots at Arizona Cardinals
Indianapolis Colts at Denver Broncos
Buffalo Bills at Detroit Lions

4:25 p.m. on Fox
Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Los Angeles Chargers
Pittsburgh Steelers at Philadelphia Eagles

8:20 p.m. on NBC*
Green Bay Packers at Seattle Seahawks

Monday, Dec. 16

8 p.m. on ABC*
Chicago Bears at Minnesota Vikings

8:30 p.m. on ESPN*
Atlanta Falcons at Las Vegas Raiders

WEEK 16

Thursday, Dec. 19

8:15 p.m. on Prime Video*
Cleveland Browns at Cincinnati Bengals

Saturday, Dec. 21

1 p.m. on NBC
Houston Texans at Kansas City Chiefs

4:30 p.m. on Fox
Pittsburgh Steelers at Baltimore Ravens

Sunday, Dec. 22

1 p.m. on CBS
New England Patriots at Buffalo Bills
Tennessee Titans at Indianapolis Colts
Los Angeles Rams at New York Jets

1 p.m. on Fox
New York Giants at Atlanta Falcons
Arizona Cardinals at Carolina Panthers
Detroit Lions at Chicago Bears
Philadelphia Eagles at Washington Commanders

4:05 p.m. on Fox
Denver Broncos at Los Angeles Chargers
Minnesota Vikings at Seattle Seahawks

4:25 p.m. on CBS
Jacksonville Jaguars at Las Vegas Raiders
San Francisco 49ers at Miami Dolphins

8:20 p.m. on NBC*
Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Dallas Cowboys

Monday, Dec. 23

8:15 p.m. on ESPN*
New Orleans Saints at Green Bay Packers

WEEK 17

Wednesday, Dec. 25 (Christmas)

1 p.m. on Netflix
Kansas City Chiefs at Pittsburgh Steelers

4:30 p.m. on Netflix
Baltimore Ravens at Houston Texans

Thursday, Dec. 26

8:15 p.m. on Prime Video*
Seattle Seahawks at Chicago Bears

Saturday, Dec. 28 or Sunday, Dec. 29

Times/networks not yet announced at press time
Denver Broncos at Cincinnati Bengals
Arizona Cardinals at Los Angeles Rams
Los Angeles Chargers at New England Patriots
Indianapolis Colts at New York Giants
Atlanta Falcons at Washington Commanders

Sunday, Dec. 29

1 p.m. on CBS
New York Jets at Buffalo Bills
Tennessee Titans at Jacksonville Jaguars
Carolina Panthers at Tampa Bay Buccaneers

1 p.m. on Fox
Green Bay Packers at Minnesota Vikings
Las Vegas Raiders at New Orleans Saints

4:25 p.m. on Fox
Dallas Cowboys at Philadelphia Eagles

8:20 p.m. on NBC*
Miami Dolphins at Cleveland Browns

Monday, Dec. 30

8:15 p.m. on ESPN and ABC*
Detroit Lions at San Francisco 49ers

WEEK 18

Saturday, Jan. 4 and Sunday, Jan. 5, 2025

Two games will be played on Saturday, the rest on Sunday; detailed schedule not yet announced at press time
San Francisco 49ers at Arizona Cardinals
Carolina Panthers at Atlanta Falcons
Cleveland Browns at Baltimore Ravens
Washington Commanders at Dallas Cowboys
Kansas City Chiefs at Denver Broncos
Minnesota Vikings at Detroit Lions
Chicago Bears at Green Bay Packers
Jacksonville Jaguars at Indianapolis Colts
Seattle Seahawks at Los Angeles Rams
Los Angeles Chargers at Las Vegas Raiders
Buffalo Bills at New England Patriots
Miami Dolphins at New York Jets
New York Giants at Philadelphia Eagles
Cincinnati Bengals at Pittsburgh Steelers
New Orleans Saints at Tampa Bay Buccaneers
Houston Texans at Tennessee Titans

Wild Card Round

Saturday, Jan. 11–Monday, Jan. 13

At press time, most dates, times and broadcasters have not been confirmed for these conference games. Per usual, the No. 7 seed will play at the No. 2, No. 6 at No. 3, No. 5 at No. 4 with the top seed getting the bye. In addition to the one locked-in game (below), Fox and Prime Video will get one game each, with CBS and NBC getting an undisclosed number of games.

Monday, Jan. 13

8:15 p.m. on ESPN and ABC

Divisional Round

Saturday, Jan. 18–Sunday, Jan. 19

Full list of broadcasters unavailable at press time. Confirmed broadcasters are CBS (at least one game), Fox (one game) and ESPN and ABC (one game); date and time not announced at press time

Championship Round

Sunday, Jan. 25

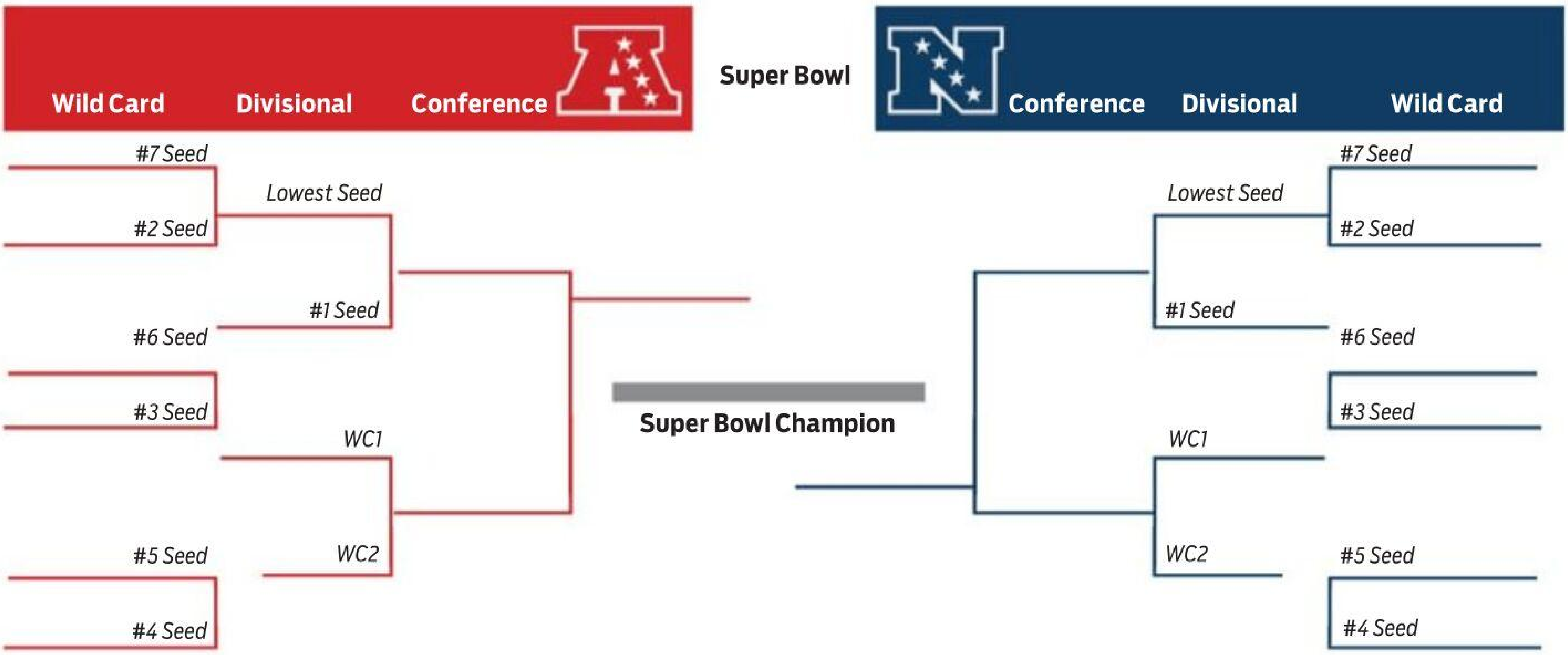
At press time, no times had been announced for these two games, but both will be played on this day
AFC Championship on CBS
NFC Championship on Fox

SUPER BOWL LIX

Sun, Feb. 9, 6:30 PM Fox
AFC vs. NFC Champions

LIX
SUPER BOWL
CAESARS SUPERDOME
NEW ORLEANS
HOST OF
SUPER BOWL LIX

NFL PLAYOFF BRACKET 2025


Wild Card
Divisional
Conference
Super Bowl
Conference
Divisional
Wild Card
#7 Seed
#2 Seed
Lowest Seed
#1 Seed
#6 Seed
#3 Seed
WC1
#5 Seed
WC2
#4 Seed
Super Bowl Champion
Lowest Seed
#7 Seed
#2 Seed
#1 Seed
#6 Seed
#3 Seed
WC1
WC2
#5 Seed
#4 Seed

LANCE KING/GETTY IMAGES

*Indicates flexible schedule: Dates and times subject to change

NFC EAST

DALLAS COWBOYS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINT

It got no better for the Cowboys than their Week 14 victory over the rival Eagles. Dak Prescott tossed two TDs in the 33–13 rout and the team improved to 10–3 and moved into a first-place tie in the NFC East with their 15th straight home win.

LOW POINT

At 8–0, the Cowboys were the NFL's lone unbeaten team at home, and were heavily favored to take care of No. 7 seed Green Bay in a wild card game. They never came close, losing 48–32, becoming the first team to fail to make it to a conference championship game after winning at least 12 games three straight years.

> **“I grew up with the Cowboys, played for 'em. As long as I can remember, the Cowboys have always had a star running back. You can't say that right now.”**
>
> **Brian Baldinger**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Mike McCarthy
2023 Record 12–5, first place in their division, lost to the Packers in the wild card round
2023 Home Record 8–0
2023 Road Record 4–5

Passing Leader Dak Prescott, 590 attempts, 410 completions, 4,516 yards, 36 TDs, 9 interceptions, 39 sacks
Rushing Leader Tony Pollard, 252 carries, 1,005 yards, 6 TDs
Receiving Leader CeeDee Lamb, 135 receptions, 1,749 yards, 12 TDs
Defense Leaders Damone Clark, 109 tackles; Micah Parsons, 14 sacks; DaRon Bland, 9 interceptions

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

The 'boys took Oklahoma OT Tyler Guyton (above) in the first round. Re-signing 29-year-old RB Ezekiel Elliott from the Patriots smacks of nostalgia.

LOSSES

OT Tyron Smith (signed with the Jets), starting center Tyler Biadasz (signed by Washington), RB Tony Pollard (signed by the Titans), and DEs Dorance Armstrong and Dante Fowler Jr. (both to Washington).

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

It is still Dak Prescott's show, with big-time weapons in WRs CeeDee Lamb (right) and Brandin Cooks, but the running game is suspect, and the offensive line is not what it was. A great deal will depend on how well the O-line improves, says NFL Network analyst and onetime Cowboy Brian Baldinger: “If they struggle up front, this whole thing is just going to collapse.”

DEFENSE

The depth has been depleted, but any front group that has LB Micah Parsons and DE DeMarcus Lawrence is capable of wreaking havoc. There's a load of talent on the back end, led by CBs Trevon Diggs and DaRon Bland and safety Malik Hooker.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Cowboys look as if they uncovered a gem in kicker Brandon Aubrey, who as a rookie hit his first 19 field goals (a record). Punter Bryan Anger was second in the league with a net average of 44.9 yards.

SPARK PLUG

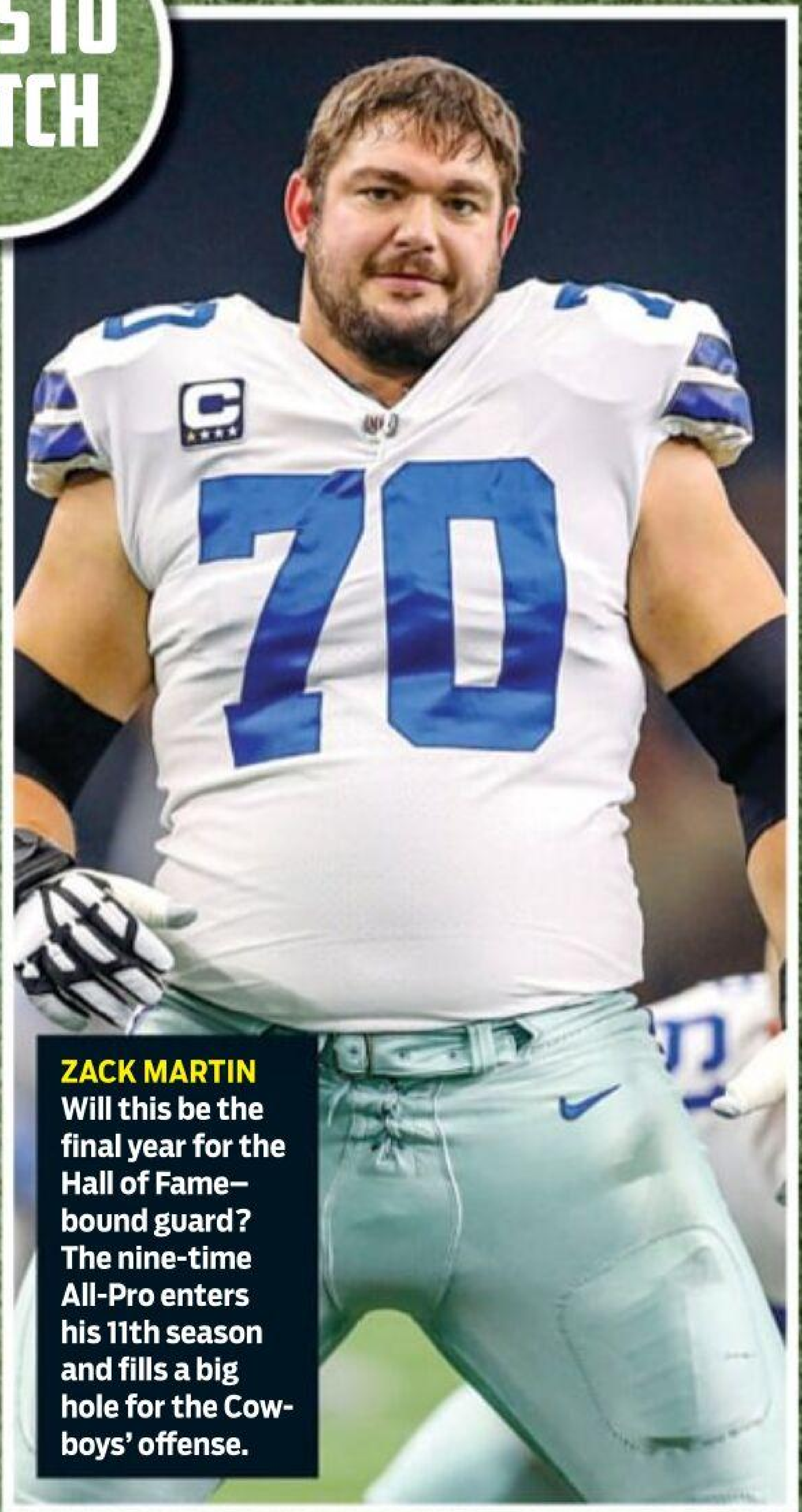
Wide receiver CeeDee Lamb wants a new contract, and how can anyone argue? He is one of the league's top weapons, coming off a superlative season with an NFL-high 135 receptions for 1,749 yards and 12 touchdowns. *—P.A. Schwartz*

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: SCOTT WINTERS/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES; RICHARD RODRIGUEZ/GETTY IMAGES; RICHARD RODRIGUEZ/GETTY IMAGES; STEVE NURENBERG/FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM/TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE VIA GETTY IMAGES; WESLEY HITT/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH

DAK PRESCOTT
In many ways, the team's QB had his best season yet, but he and the squad he leads haven't found the way to advance in the playoffs.

MICAH PARSONS
The most valuable member of the Cowboys' defense, the linebacker must always be accounted for by opposing offensive linemen.



ZACK MARTIN
Will this be the final year for the Hall of Fame–bound guard? The nine-time All-Pro enters his 11th season and fills a big hole for the Cowboys' offense.

JALEN HURTS Playing half the season with a nagging knee injury curtailed some of the double-threat QB's skills, but he still rushed for 605 yards on the year.

ONE TO WATCH

MITCHELL LEFF/GETTY IMAGES

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES

NFC EAST

> The stink of going 1–5 down the stretch after going 10–1 was awful. I feel like the Eagles are better in every area this year.
>
> Brian Baldinger

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Nick Sirianni
2023 Record 11–6, second place NFC East, lost in NFC Wild Card playoff round to Tampa Bay
2023 Home Record 6–2
2023 Road Record: 5–4

Passing Leader Jalen Hurts, 538 attempts, 352 completions, 3,858 yards, 23 TDs, 15 interceptions, 36 sacks
Rushing Leader D'Andre Swift, 229 carries, 1,049 yards, 5 TDs
Receiving Leader A.J. Brown, 106 receptions, 1,456 yards, 7 TDs
Defense Leaders Reed Blankenship, 113 tackles; Haason Reddick, 11 sacks; Reed Blankenship, 3 interceptions

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

In Weeks 11 and 12, the Eagles beat the Chiefs in Kansas City—sweet revenge after losing Super Bowl LVII—then came back for a thrilling victory over the Bills on a Jalen Hurts touchdown run in OT. Heading into December, the Eagles were 10–1, best in the league.

LOW POINTS

Stretch run? More like a wretched run. The wheels came off as the Eagles sagged to the finish, losing five of their last six regular-season games, including blowouts to the 49ers (42–19), Cowboys (33–13) and—for heaven's sake—the lowly Giants (27–10). With a crumbling defense, the Eagles completed their disintegration with a 32–9 wild card loss.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

LEFT: COOPER NEILL/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: SCOTT TAETSCH/GETTY IMAGES

GAINS

Signed RB Saquon Barkley (above) from the rival Giants. Other key free agent adds: safety C.J. Gardner-Johnson (from the Lions), DE Bryce Huff (Jets), LB Devin White (Bucs).

LOSSES

Retirement of center Jason Kelce and DT Fletcher Cox removes two Hall of Fame–caliber players. Other losses include LB Haason Reddick (traded to the Jets) and RB D'Andre Swift, who signed with the Bears.

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

Jalen Hurts makes it all go, and due to injuries, he was not his usual dynamic run-pass threat in 2023. Hurts has a top-tier wide receiver tandem in A.J. Brown (right) and DeVonta Smith, and new RB Saquon Barkley could shine "because he's never seen an offensive line like this one," says NFL Network analyst Brian Baldinger.

DEFENSE

The main thrust was to upgrade what had become a porous secondary, and the draft selections of CBs Quinyon Mitchell from Toledo and Cooper DeJean from Iowa should provide immediate help for veteran cornerback Darius Slay Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Eagles are rarely out of scoring range with long-distance kicking specialist Jake Elliott. Rookie Cooper DeJean from Iowa could be a kick-returning threat.

SPARK PLUG

Linebacker acquisition Devin White spent the first five years of his career with the Bucs, amassing 566 tackles, 23 sacks and 6 forced fumbles. At 26, he has plenty left in the tank. *—PAS*

NFC EAST

NEW YORK GIANTS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINT

Tommy DeVito, the third-string quarterback, had to step in after injuries to Daniel Jones and Tyrod Taylor. After a rough start, DeVito won three straight games, the most impressive a 24–22 victory over the playoff-bound Packers Week 14 on *Monday Night Football*. DeVito was NFC Offensive Player of the Week.

LOW POINTS

It does not get any worse than opening up the season by losing 40–0 at home to the rival Cowboys. Talk about a buzzkill. As it turned out, this was a sign of things to come—in Week 10, the Giants were thrashed 49–17 in Dallas, making their combined losses to the Cowboys an unsightly 89–17.

> **Even if Daniel Jones is healthy, I don't see more scrambling as a good way to move the football. He's not Josh Allen, so stop acting like he's Josh Allen.**
>
> **Brian Baldinger**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Brian Daboll
2023 Record 6–11, third in the division
2023 Home Record 4–4
2023 Road Record 2–7

Passing Leader Tyrod Taylor, 180 attempts, 116 completions, 1,341 yards, 5 TDs, 3 interceptions, 17 sacks
Rushing Leader Saquon Barkley, 247 carries, 962 yards, 6 TDs
Receiving Leader Wan'Dale Robinson, 60 receptions, 525 yards, 1 TD
Defense Leaders Bobby Okereke, 149 tackles; Kayvon Thibodeaux, 11.5 sacks; Xavier McKinney, 3 interceptions

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

A trade with the Panthers brought in linebacker Brian Burns. Former Texans RB Devin Singletary was signed and the offensive line was revamped. First-round draft pick Malik Nabers (above), WR from LSU, should make a quick impact.

LOSSES

Two of the team's top players left as free agents—RB Saquon Barkley (to the Eagles) and safety Xavier McKinney (the Packers).

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

Many fans have seen enough of QB Daniel Jones, but he will start. Jon Runyan Jr., newly signed from the Packers, starts at guard. Andrew Thomas (right) is one of the top OTs in the league.

DEFENSE

The addition of Brian Burns, now in his prime, provides this unit with bookends, as Burns and LB Kayvon Thibodeaux are long and athletic pass rushers. DT Dexter Lawrence II is a star and LB Bobby Okereke had an outstanding debut season, but the defensive backfield is a work in progress.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Graham Gano is one of the most talented kickers in the league, but he lasted only eight games last season before needing knee surgery. At 37, he must show he still can be in peak form.

SPARK PLUG

"He's going to be something they haven't had in a long time," says NFL Network analyst Brian Baldinger of No. 6 overall pick Malik Nabers, the most dynamic wide receiver to come to the Giants since Odell Beckham Jr. Nabers should quickly become the top target in the passing game. *—PS*

SARAH STIER/GETTY IMAGES (2)

ONES TO WATCH

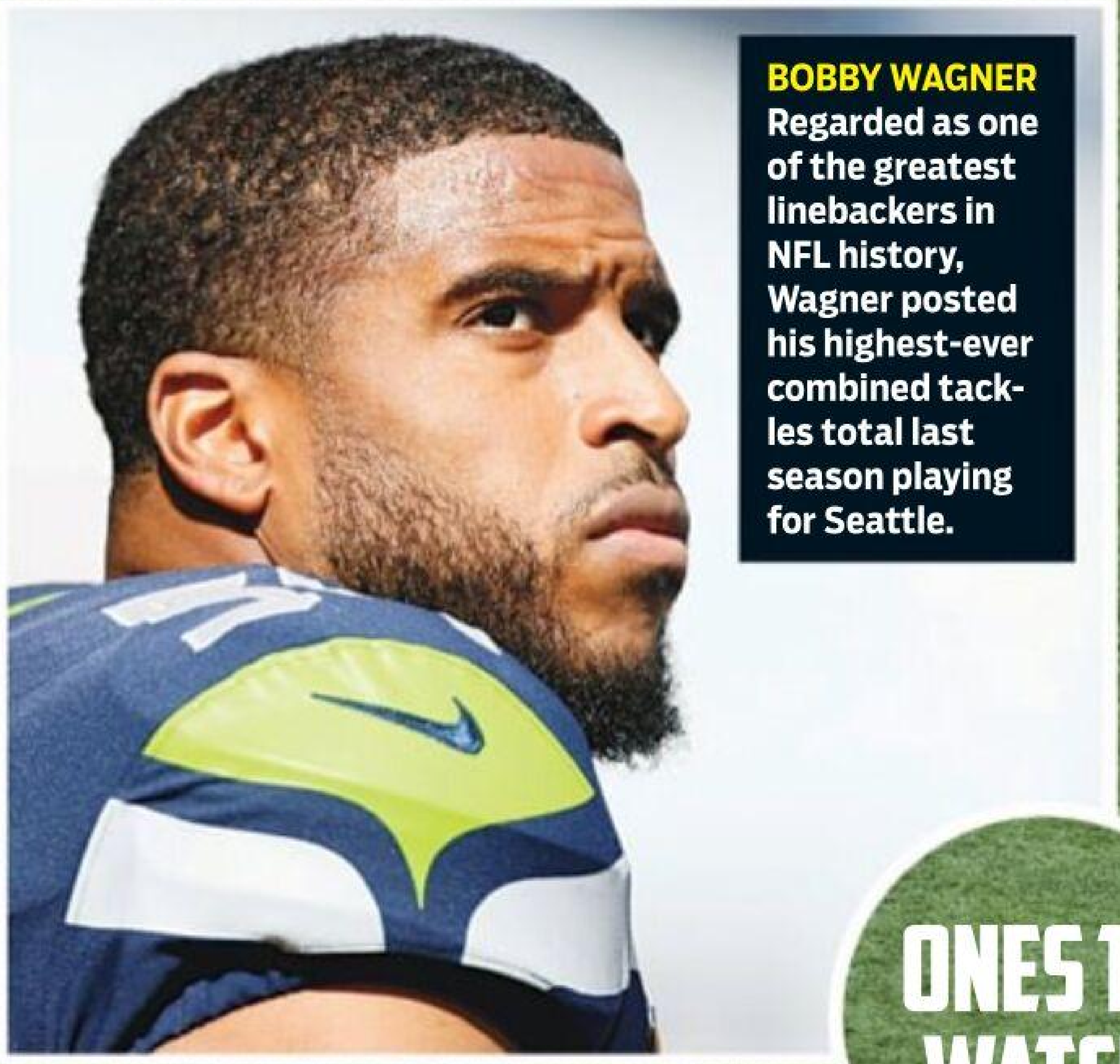
DANIEL JONES
The Daniel Jones—as-starting-QB era enters year six, after Jones' truncated 2023 season following an injury and reconstructive knee surgery.

KAYVON THIBODEAUX
The linebacker continued to elevate his game in 2023, scoring 11.5 sacks and living up to the hype of being drafted fifth overall in 2022.

DEXTER LAWRENCE II
The defensive tackle starts his sixth year with the team as an exemplary pass rusher and is coming off of two All-Pro seasons.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: MICHAEL REAVES/GETTY IMAGES; COOPER NEILL/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL OWENS/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH



BOBBY WAGNER
Regarded as one of the greatest linebackers in NFL history, Wagner posted his highest-ever combined tackles total last season playing for Seattle.

AUSTIN EKELER
After seven seasons with the Chargers, the running back and receiving specialist will add an extra element to the Jayden Daniels–led offense.

TERRY MCLAURIN
The reliable WR and 2023 Pro Bowler has averaged over 75 catches and 1,000 yards receiving through each of his five seasons.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM: G FIUME/GETTY IMAGES; STEPH CHAMBERS/GETTY IMAGES; MEG OLIPHANT/GETTY IMAGES

WASHINGTON COMMANDERS

NFC EAST

> **Dan Quinn is a good coach. He's got [arguably] the best quarterback in the draft, and they upgraded the offensive talent. Defensively, they were the worst in football last year.**
>
> **Brian Baldinger**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Dan Quinn
2023 Record 4–13, last place in the division
2023 Home Record 1–7
2023 Road Record 3–6

Passing Leader Sam Howell, 612 attempts, 388 completions, 3,946 yards, 21 TDs, 21 interceptions, 65 sacks
Rushing Leader Brian Robinson Jr., 178 carries, 733 yards, 5 TDs
Receiving Leader Terry McLaurin, 79 receptions, 1,002 yards, 4 TDs
Defense Leaders Cody Barton, 121 tackles; Montez Sweat, 6.5 sacks; Kendall Fuller and Quan Martin, 2 interceptions

2023 WRAP-UP

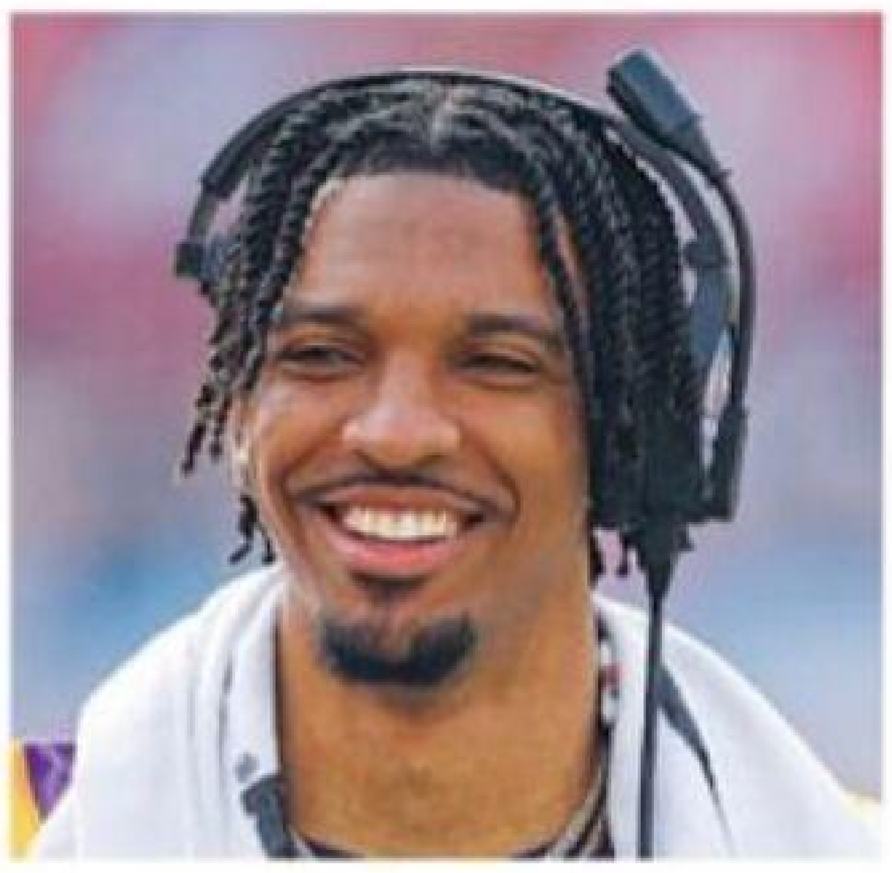
HIGH POINT

Brian Robinson Jr. ran for two touchdowns to lead a fourth-quarter comeback for a 35–33 victory in Denver that made the Commanders 2–0 for the first time since 2011. Hope abounded. It was a promising way to open the season for Sam Howell in his first year as the starting quarterback.

LOW POINT

Pretty much everything after that 2–0 start. The Commanders went 2–13 the rest of the way, including a brutal eight-game losing streak to end the season, prompting the firing of Ron Rivera after four years as head coach. The point differential of -189 was the worst in the league.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL



GAINS

Signed RB Austin Ekeler (from the Chargers), guard Nick Allegretti (of the Chiefs) and two ex-Cowboys: center Tyler Biadasz and DE Dorance Armstrong. Plus QB Jayden Daniels (above) from LSU, the No. 2 overall pick in the draft.

LOSSES

DE Montez Sweat was traded to the Bears and QB Sam Howell to the Seahawks. WR Curtis Samuel was released; signed with the Bills.

LEFT: MIKE EHRMANN/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: TOM HAUCK/GETTY IMAGES

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

Jayden Daniels put together a prolific 2023 season at LSU and won the Heisman Trophy. His ability to make big plays will be the centerpiece of the Washington attack, but his skinny frame will need to be protected. WR Terry McLaurin will make Daniels' life easier.

DEFENSE

Safety Jeremy Chinn (free agent from the Panthers) and rookie CB Mike Sainristil (out of Michigan) should bolster what was one of the NFL's worst defensive backfields. A revamped front group should be more workmanlike with Armstrong and veteran DT Jonathan Allen (right). "We'll see what [34-year-old LB] Bobby Wagner looks like, and some of the guys they brought in might be a little long in the tooth," says NFL Network analyst Brian Baldinger.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Reliable punter Tress Way has been at it for a decade with this franchise; of his 73 punts in 2023, only two were for touchbacks.

WASHINGTON
93

SPARK PLUG

Rookie WR Luke McCaffrey has a famous brother in the NFL (Christian); their dad Ed played WR in the NFL for 13 years. Luke caught 13 TD passes at Rice in 2023 and specializes in getting open from the slot and making one-handed grabs. *—PAS*

DETROIT LIONS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

Started the season on a huge high by beating the Chiefs in Week 1, announcing right away that they were a team to be reckoned with. The Lions continued that pattern through a banner season, tying a franchise record with 12 victories and winning their division by three games over the 9–8 Packers.

LOW POINTS

Their 20–19 loss to Dallas in Week 17, especially so given that a botched call by the referees negated a 2-point conversion with 23 seconds left that would have given the Lions the win. But of course, losing to the 49ers on the cusp of the Super Bowl after being up by 17 at halftime hurt worse.

> **“This is one of my favorite teams. They’re exciting as hell and they’ll be more exciting this year. And Jared Goff has a comfort level in the way they like to attack.”**
>
> **Louis Riddick**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Dan Campbell
2023 Record 12–5, won the division, lost to San Francisco in the NFC Championship Game
2023 Home Record 6–2
2023 Away Record 6–3

Passing Leader Jared Goff, 605 attempts, 407 completions, 4,575 yards, 30 TDs, 12 interceptions, 30 sacks
Rushing Leader David Montgomery, 219 carries, 1,015 yards, 13 TDs
Receiving Leader Amon-Ra St. Brown, 119 receptions, 1,515 yards, 10 TDs
Defense Leaders Alex Anzalone, 129 tackles; Aidan Hutchinson, 11.5 sacks; Kerby Joseph, 4 interceptions

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

Detroit traded up to get Alabama cornerback Terrion Arnold (above) in the first round of the draft, and added fellow CB Ennis Rakestraw Jr. from Missouri in Round 2. The team also signed Bengals DT DJ Reader to shore up run defense.

LOSSES

Guard Jonah Jackson signed with the Los Angeles Rams; safety C.J. Gardner-Johnson inked a deal with the Eagles.

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

This is a team with one of the best O-lines in the league, “with ridiculous explosiveness at running back,” says ESPN NFL analyst Louis Riddick. “And Amon-Ra St. Brown has been spectacularly productive at wide receiver.”

DEFENSE

“They’ve really improved,” Riddick believes. One big offseason goal was met with a retooled secondary by drafting cornerbacks Terrion Arnold and Ennis Rakestraw Jr. “Their linebackers are solid, DJ Reader gives them some push in the middle and they just need someone to help [defensive end] Aidan Hutchinson to give them another outside presence.”

SPECIAL TEAMS

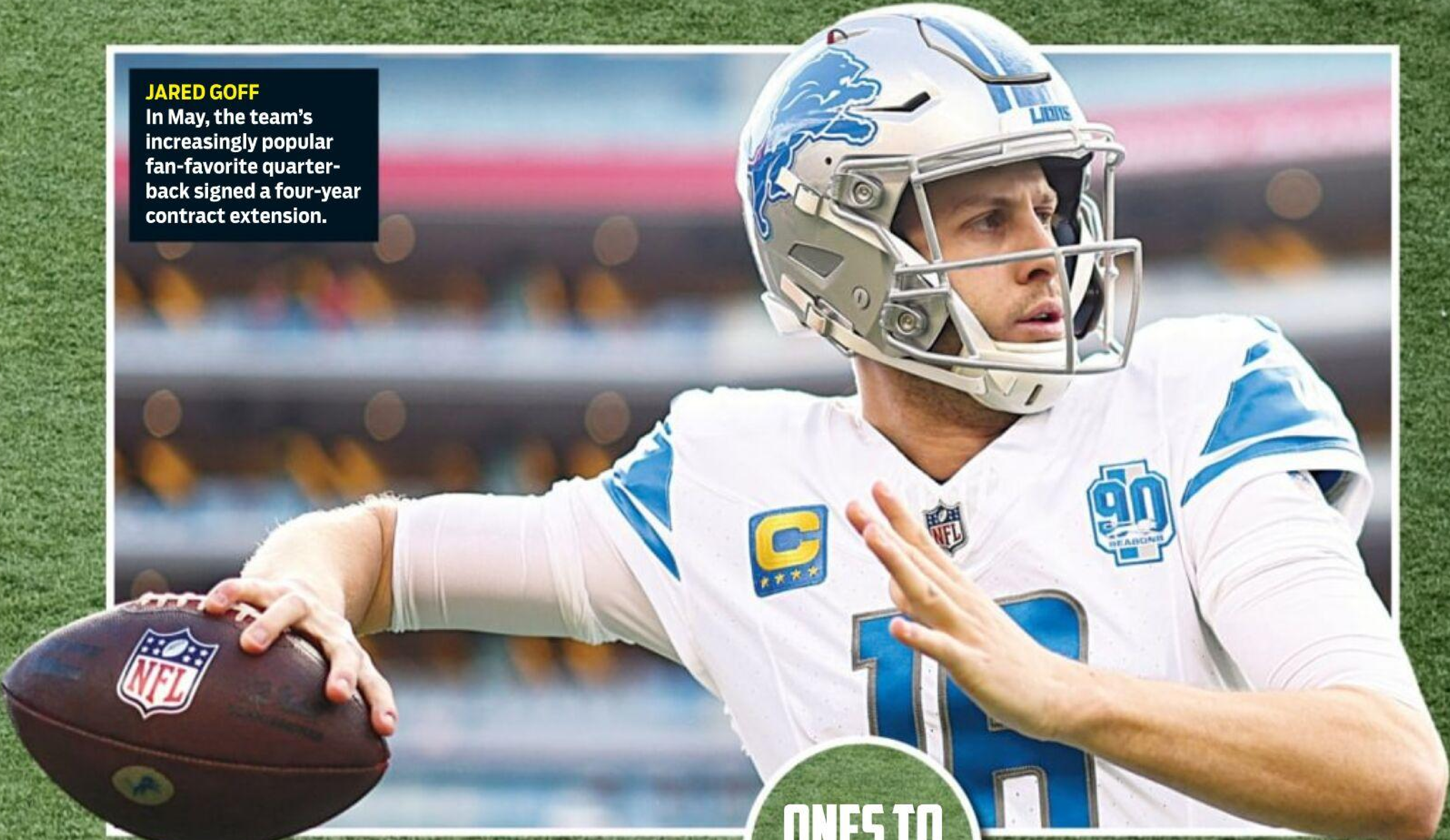
Riddick likes the resolve of the Lions’ coverage units, “which is where field position battles are won.” Plus, Kalif Raymond was among the elite players in punt return average in 2023.

SPARK PLUG

Running back Jahmyr Gibbs (left) “could be an MVP candidate this year,” Riddick says. “His ability as a ball carrier or a receiver is different than any other running back. He can go 99 yards on you at any time.” *—Josh Karp*

LEFT: TODD ROSENBERG/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: MICHAEL ZAGARIS/SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH



JARED GOFF
In May, the team's increasingly popular fan-favorite quarterback signed a four-year contract extension.

SAM LAPORTA
The Offensive Rookie of the Year finalist set an NFL record for most receptions by a first-year tight end with 86.

AMON-RA ST. BROWN
His production has increased in each of his three NFL seasons, and he was a force during the 2023 playoffs.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: KEVIN SABITUS/GETTY IMAGES (2); RYAN KANG/GETTY IMAGES

ONE TO WATCH

JORDAN LOVE
The Packers star is one of four QBs taken in Round 1 of the 2020 draft who are starting for their respective teams. The others: Joe Burrow of the Bengals, Tua Tagovailoa of the Dolphins and Justin Herbert of the Chargers.

RICHARD RODRIGUEZ/GETTY IMAGES

GREEN BAY PACKERS

NFC NORTH

> **This is a team you have to give consideration to as a serious contender. They'll build on the youth they've assembled and be in the mix come January.**
>
> Louis Riddick

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Matt LaFleur
2023 Record 9–8, lost to San Francisco in the divisional round of the playoffs
2023 Home Record 5–3
2023 Away Record 4–5

Passing Leader Jordan Love, 579 attempts, 372 completions, 4,159 yards, 32 TDs, 11 interceptions, 30 sacks
Rushing Leader Aaron Jones, 142 carries, 656 yards, 2 TDs
Receiving Leader Jayden Reed, 64 receptions, 793 yards, 8 TDs
Defense Leaders Quay Walker, 118 tackles; Rashan Gary, 9 sacks; Rudy Ford, 2 interceptions

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINT

Their dismantling of the seemingly formidable Cowboys in the playoffs, and the way they took control and ran the football against the second-seeded team in the NFC. At one point the Packers led the game by 32 points against a heavily favored opponent by playing without fear.

LOW POINT

The way their season ended. Even though it was a great performance against San Francisco, their youth caught up to them. Quarterback Jordan Love threw two interceptions and 49ers QB Brock Purdy engineered the game-winning drive. But they'll learn from it, and it will make them better.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

OT Jordan Morgan (above), their first-round pick from Arizona; free agent RB Josh Jacobs, picked up from the Raiders; safety Xavier McKinney, signed from the Giants after a comeback season.

LOSSES

Guard Jon Runyan, who signed with the Giants; former top running back Aaron Jones, who signed with the Vikings after being released by the Packers.

LEFT: STACY REVERE/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: JIM MCISAAC/GETTY IMAGES

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

"They're as scary as it comes with explosiveness and a nucleus that hit their stride once Jordan Love got acclimated," says ESPN NFL analyst Louis Riddick of the Packers squad and quarterback. He especially likes their "ridiculous" running crew of MarShawn Lloyd, Josh Jacobs and AJ Dillon.

DEFENSE

"They've got multi-positional playmakers on a team that's [ascending]," Riddick says, adding that they've fortified their secondary. And linebacker Rashan Gary "still hasn't hit his peak as a pass rusher."

SPECIAL TEAMS

Credit kick/punt returners Keisean Nixon (left) and second-year man Jayden Reed for giving the Packers another A grade in this phase of the game. Those players allow the team "to change field position and momentum," says Riddick.

SPARK PLUG

"Outside of Love, who's turning into a dynamic player, the guy who can rip the game open is [speedy WR] Christian Watson," says Riddick, citing his ability to create "explosive chunk plays every team puts a premium on." *—JK*

NFC NORTH

MINNESOTA VIKINGS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINT

In Week 7, the Vikings showed they could play with the best of the NFL by tackling San Francisco and keeping Brock Purdy off-balance at home. This win suggested that if they're firing on all cylinders, they can make it a close game against anyone.

LOW POINTS

Their Week 15 overtime loss to Cincinnati began a four-game losing streak to close out the season, a drop that proved to be huge, if understandable. They started the year 4–4 but in that eighth game, Kirk Cousins, who was starting to ramp things up, suffered a season-ending Achilles injury. The Vikings never quite recovered from that.

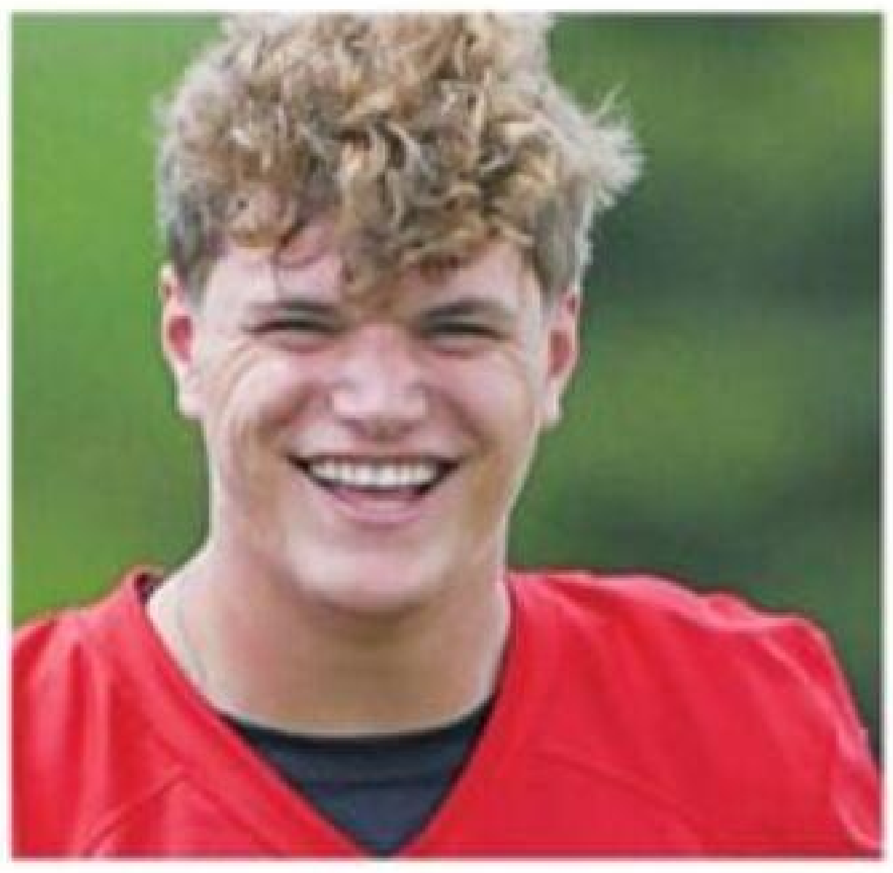
> **“Minnesota could be in the same boat as Green Bay was last year. Rookie QB J.J. McCarthy could really make this team explode this year.”**
>
> **Louis Riddick**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Kevin O'Connell
2023 Record 7–10, tied for last place in the division
2023 Home Record 2–6
2023 Away Record 5–4

Passing Leader Kirk Cousins, 311 attempts, 216 completions, 2,331 yards, 18 TDs, 5 interceptions, 17 sacks
Rushing Leader Alexander Mattison, 180 carries, 700 yards, 0 TDs
Receiving Leader T.J. Hockenson, 95 receptions, 960 yards, 5 TDs
Defense Leaders Camryn Bynum, 137 tackles; Danielle Hunter, 16.5 sacks; Byron Murphy Jr., 3 interceptions

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL



GAINS

Two great first-round picks—QB J.J. McCarthy (above) from Michigan and Alabama linebacker Dallas Turner; free agent RB Aaron Jones from the division rival Packers; and linebacker Jonathan Greenard from the Texans.

LOSSES

A couple of big names: Pro Bowl DE Danielle Hunter signed with the Texans and QB Kirk Cousins left for the Falcons.

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

The Vikings could be a real sleeper team on the way up, says ESPN NFL analyst Louis Riddick. “They've got a strong offensive line with two bookend tackles, a top-five tight end in T.J. Hockenson (right) and arguably the best wide receiver in the NFL in Justin Jefferson.” Much of the pace of progress will depend on how long it takes for rookie QB J.J. McCarthy to get up to speed.

DEFENSE

Riddick likes the addition of LB Dallas Turner to help with the pass rush. But long pass coverage, which has been an issue, will help determine the team's fate.

SPECIAL TEAMS

“Kene Nwangwu is an X factor and one of the most explosive kick returners in the NFL,” Riddick says of the running back, who averaged 25.3 yards per return last year. “He can fly.”

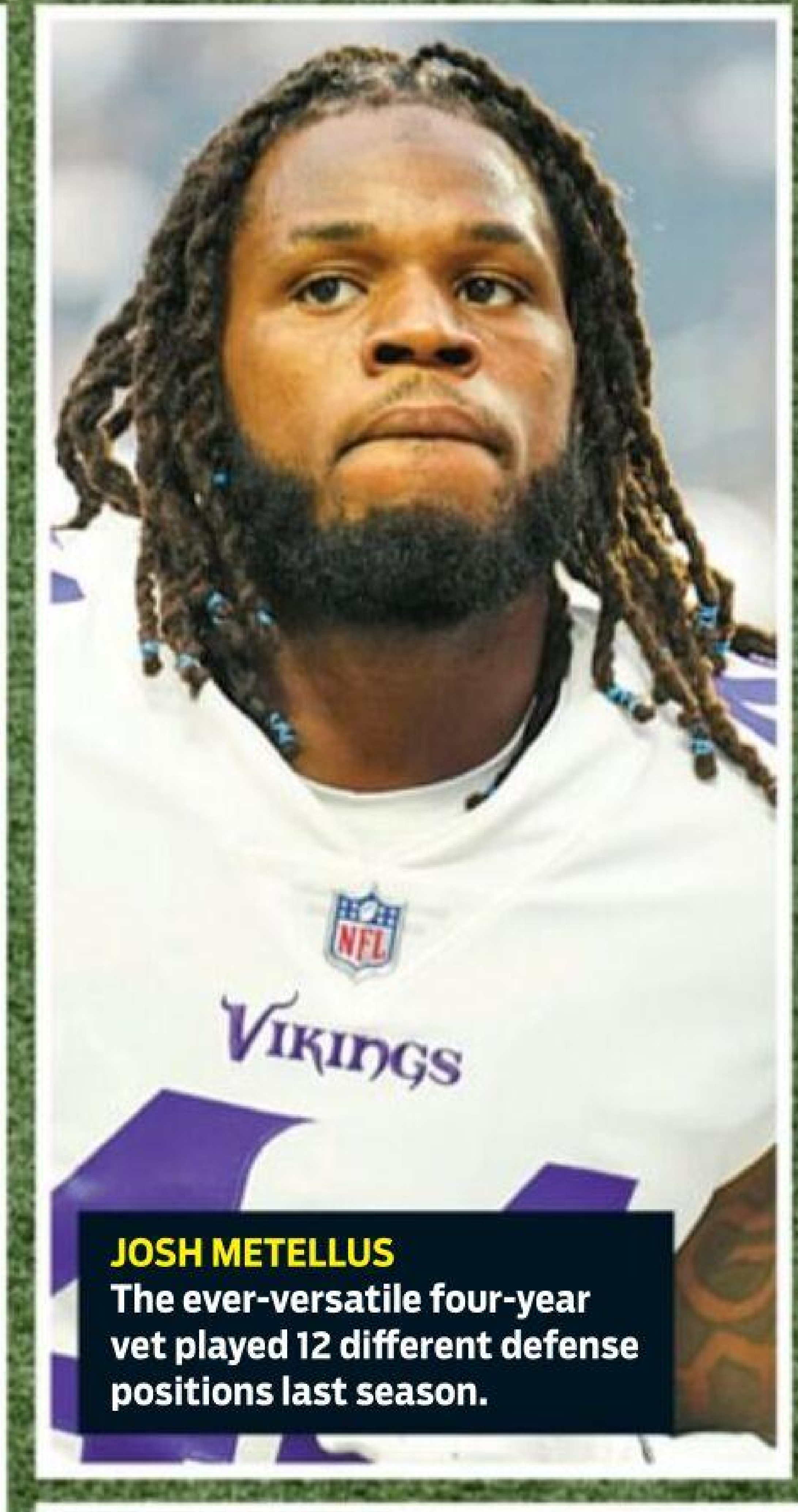
SPARK PLUG

“Justin Jefferson is the heart and soul of this team and one of the top five players in the NFL,” says Riddick. “He has Spider-Man tracking skills, leaping ability, strength and speed. He's just *too good*.” —JK

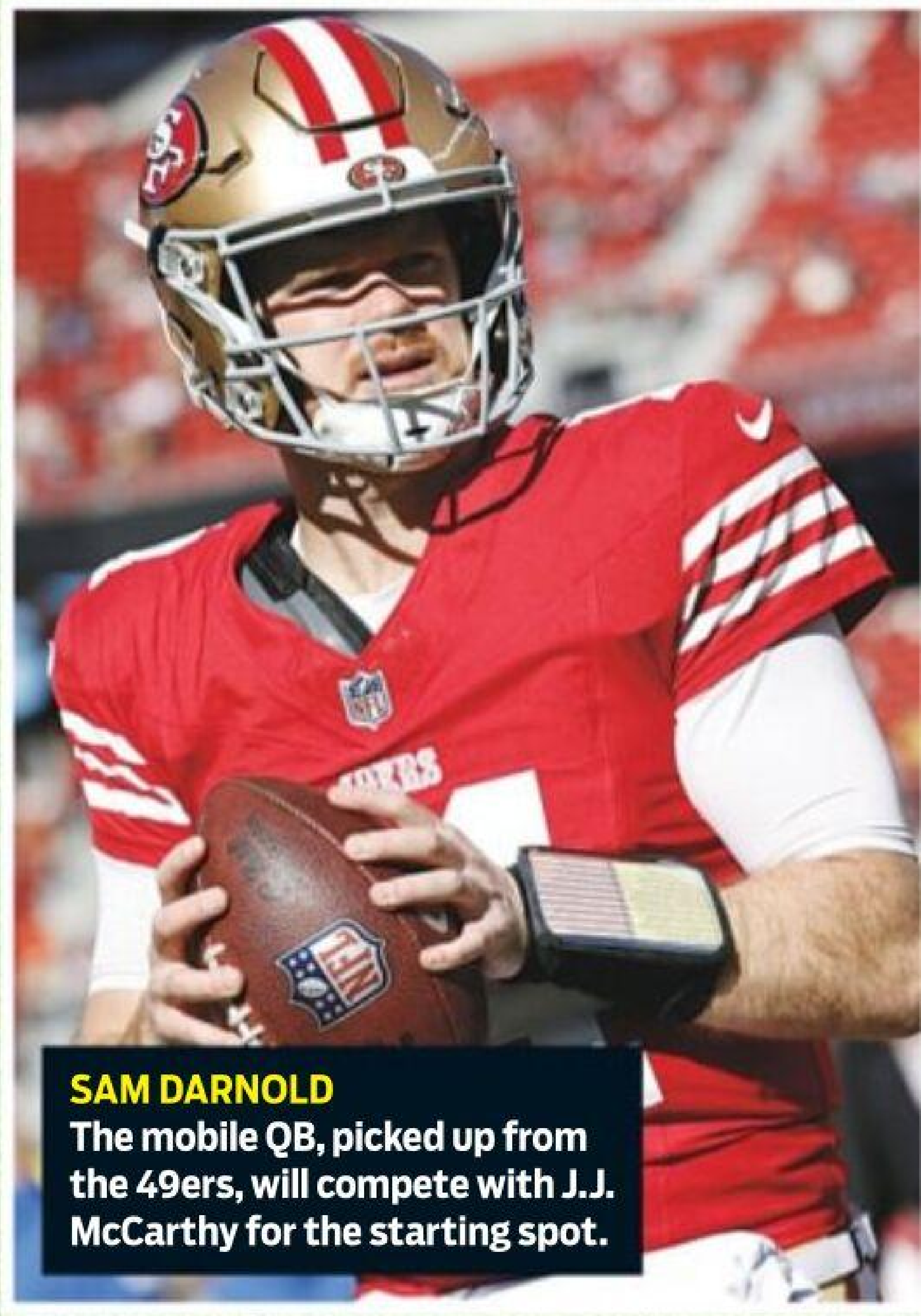
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: NIC ANTAYA/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS UNGER/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL ZAGARIS/SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS/GETTY IMAGES; SCOTT TAETSCH/GETTY IMAGES; NICK WOSIKA/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH

JORDAN ADDISON
Drafted by the Vikings in the first round in 2023, Addison made the All-Rookie team after a 70-reception season.



JOSH METELLUS
The ever-versatile four-year vet played 12 different defense positions last season.



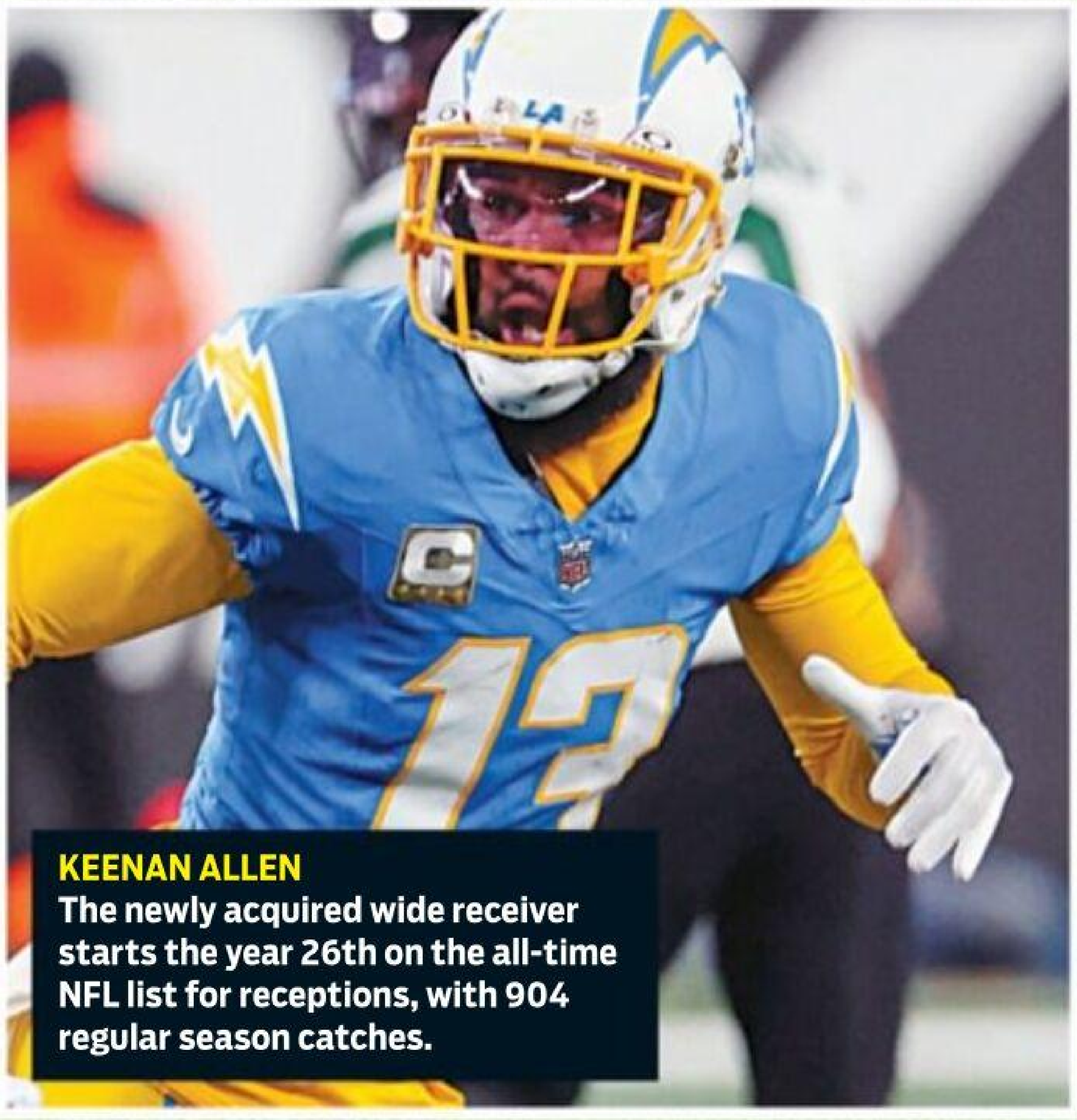
SAM DARNOLD
The mobile QB, picked up from the 49ers, will compete with J.J. McCarthy for the starting spot.

ONES TO WATCH

CHICAGOBEARS.COM
HYUNDAI
WILLIAMS

CALEB WILLIAMS
The draft's top pick goes to a team with an overall better record and slate of players than most No. 1s. The Bears should benefit.

JAYLON JOHNSON
The team's Defensive Player of the Year had a career season, capped by being selected for the Pro Bowl.



KEENAN ALLEN
The newly acquired wide receiver starts the year 26th on the all-time NFL list for receptions, with 904 regular season catches.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: MICHAEL REAVES/GETTY IMAGES; AL PEREIRA/GETTY IMAGES; TODD ROSENBERG/GETTY IMAGES

CHICAGO BEARS

NFC NORTH

> **They need to get going right out of the gate. They have [an exciting young offense. The question is], can they pull out as much positive as possible from Caleb Williams?**
>
> Louis Riddick

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Matt Eberflus
2023 Record 7–10, tied for last in division
2023 Home Record 5–3
2023 Away Record 2–7

Passing Leader Justin Fields, 370 attempts, 227 completions, 2,562 yards, 16 TDs, 9 interceptions, 44 sacks
Rushing Leader Justin Fields, 124 attempts, 657 yards, 4 TDs
Receiving Leader DJ Moore, 96 receptions, 1,364 yards, 8 TDs
Defense Leaders T.J. Edwards, 155 tackles; Montez Sweat, 6 sacks; Tremaine Edmunds, Jaylon Johnson and Tyrique Stevenson, 4 interceptions

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINT

Their Week 5 win at Washington—the Bears' first of the season—showed what the offense could really do when they get things going. It also suggested why DJ Moore was someone GM Ryan Poles wanted and why he would eventually become a franchise player.

LOW POINTS

A couple of options. In their Week 11 game at the Lions, the Bears became the first team in history to lose a game while having possession for over 40 minutes. And the final contest of the year, against Green Bay, laid bare their yearlong issue of not protecting Justin Fields enough and consistently generating passing plays.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

Picked USC quarterback Caleb Williams No. 1 in draft; drafted WR Rome Odunze from Washington; acquired WR Keenan Allen in a trade with the Chargers; signed Pro Bowl RB D'Andre Swift (above) from the Eagles.

LOSSES

Traded QB Justin Fields to Pittsburgh; DT Justin Jones signed with the Cardinals; WR Darnell Mooney picked up by the Falcons.

LEFT: JEFFREY VEST/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES, RIGHT: PATRICK MCDERMOTT/GETTY IMAGES

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

"You've got one of the best offensive lines in football," says ESPN NFL analyst Louis Riddick. "They'll be able to run the football and they're loaded at wide receiver with DJ Moore (right), Keenan Allen and Rome Odunze."

DEFENSE

The Bears have a good squad of linebackers, a great young cornerback in Jaylon Johnson and "safety Jaquan Brisker is on the rise. But it starts up front," Riddick reminds. "Do they have enough horses, and are they good enough to affect the elite passers in the NFL?"

SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Tory Taylor "is one of the guys taken outside the first or second round" who Riddick sees as "having the biggest impact" of anyone in the draft. That will come in handy when the team is playing for field position and expecting to see some growing pains with its young offense.

SPARK PLUG

True, Caleb Williams, with dual pass-run capabilities, is expected to shine, but Riddick also tabs wide receiver Moore. "I don't think there's any question he's the guy," the expert says, "because he can play all three [receiver] positions and make the run after catch when they need him to deliver." *—JK*

NFC SOUTH

TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINT

After winning the NFC South to make the playoffs on the final week of the season, the Bucs trounced the defending NFC champion Eagles 32–9 in the first round of the playoffs. Baker Mayfield became the first QB in team history to throw for 300-plus yards, 3 touchdowns and 0 interceptions in a playoff game.

LOW POINTS

Winning the division in their first year post–Tom Brady was more than most fans could have hoped for, but the Bucs did start 3–1 before dropping six of seven in the middle of the season. A four-turnover loss in Week 17 to the Saints that kept the division up for grabs was also a clunker.

> **“They have the best defense in the division. They should be the team to beat. Now it’s up to Mayfield and the offense to not foul things up.”**
>
> **Chris Myers**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Todd Bowles
2023 Record 9–8, first in division, lost in divisional round to Detroit
2023 Home Record 4–4
2023 Away Record 5–4

Passing Leader Baker Mayfield, 566 attempts, 364 completions, 4,044 yards, 28 TDs, 10 interceptions, 40 sacks
Rushing Leader Rachaad White, 272 carries, 990 yards, 6 TDs
Receiving Leader Mike Evans, 79 receptions, 1,255 yards, 13 TDs
Defense Leaders: Lavonte David, 134 tackles; YaYa Diaby, 7.5 sacks; Antoine Winfield Jr., 3 interceptions

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

CB Bryce Hall and safety Jordan Whitehead signed from the Jets, LB Randy Gregory signed from the 49ers; center Graham Barton (above) drafted in the first round from Duke; OLB Chris Braswell (second round) drafted from Alabama.

LOSSES

CB Carlton Davis (traded to Detroit), WR David Moore (signed with the Panthers), LB Devin White (signed with the Eagles).

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

“Mayfield produced on the field like the Baker of old, and got them into the postseason,” says Fox sports analyst Chris Myers of the veteran QB’s first year with the Bucs, when he put up a 4,000-yard season. Tampa also signed WR Mike Evans to a two-year extension. They hope to solidify the O-line, anchored by three-time Pro Bowl OT Tristan Wirfs (right) with their top draft pick, Duke center Graham Barton.

DEFENSE

Antoine Winfield Jr. is among the best safeties in the league and is now the highest-paid defensive back in football. The Bucs re-signed Lavonte David but released fellow LB Shaquil Barrett.

SPECIAL TEAMS

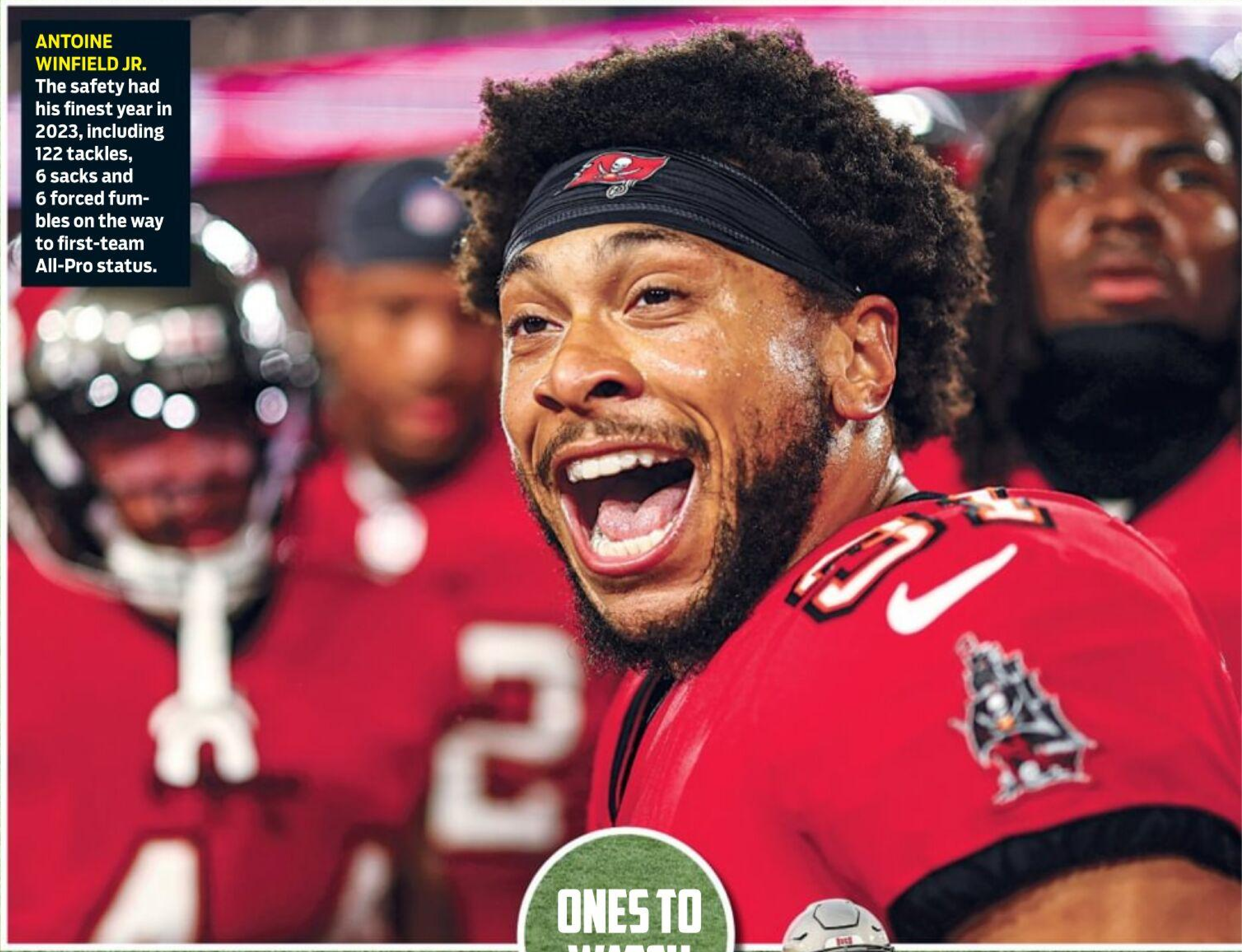
Kicker Chase McLaughlin had a great first season in Tampa with a career-high 93.5% field goal percentage, making seven of eight kicks from 50 yards or more.

SPARK PLUG

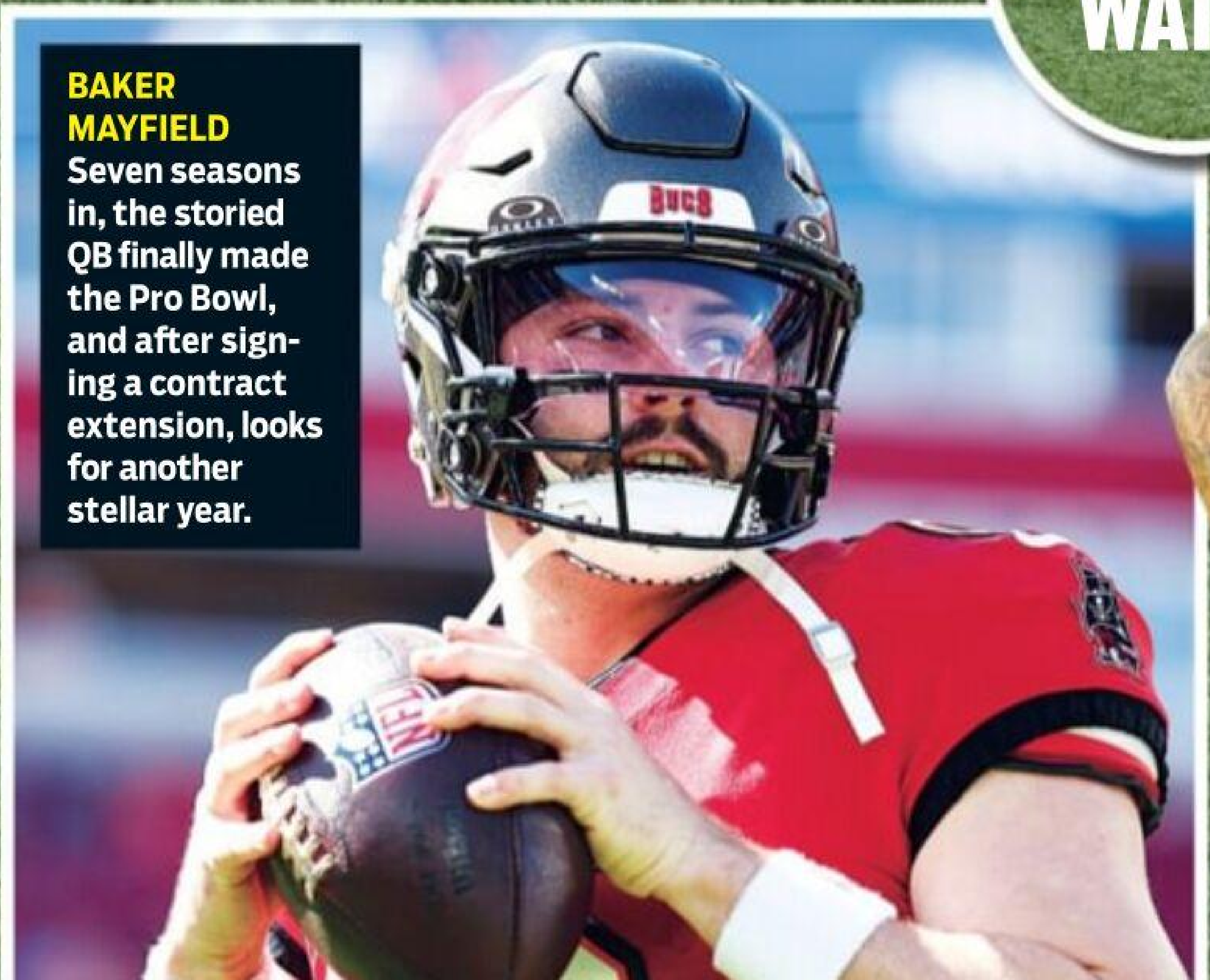
LB YaYa Diaby led the team with 7.5 sacks and took the starting job from the team’s 2021 first draft pick Joe Tryon-Shoyinka. He has a chance to grow into a mainstay for a franchise that’s had good linebacker play in recent years.
—David Tanklefsky

LEFT: CLIFF WELCH/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: PERRY KNOTTS/GETTY IMAGES

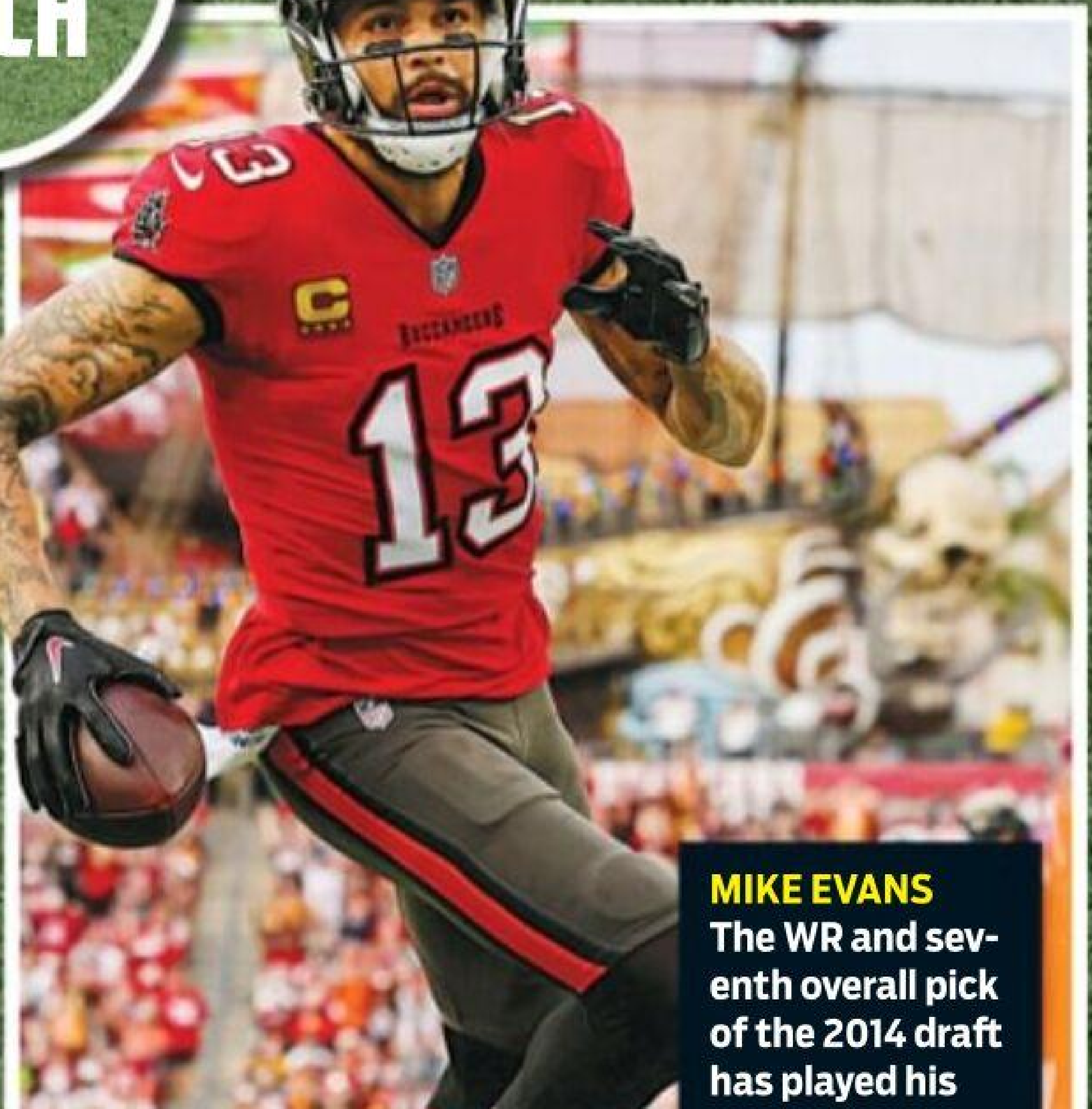
ONES TO WATCH



ANTOINE WINFIELD JR. The safety had his finest year in 2023, including 122 tackles, 6 sacks and 6 forced fumbles on the way to first-team All-Pro status.



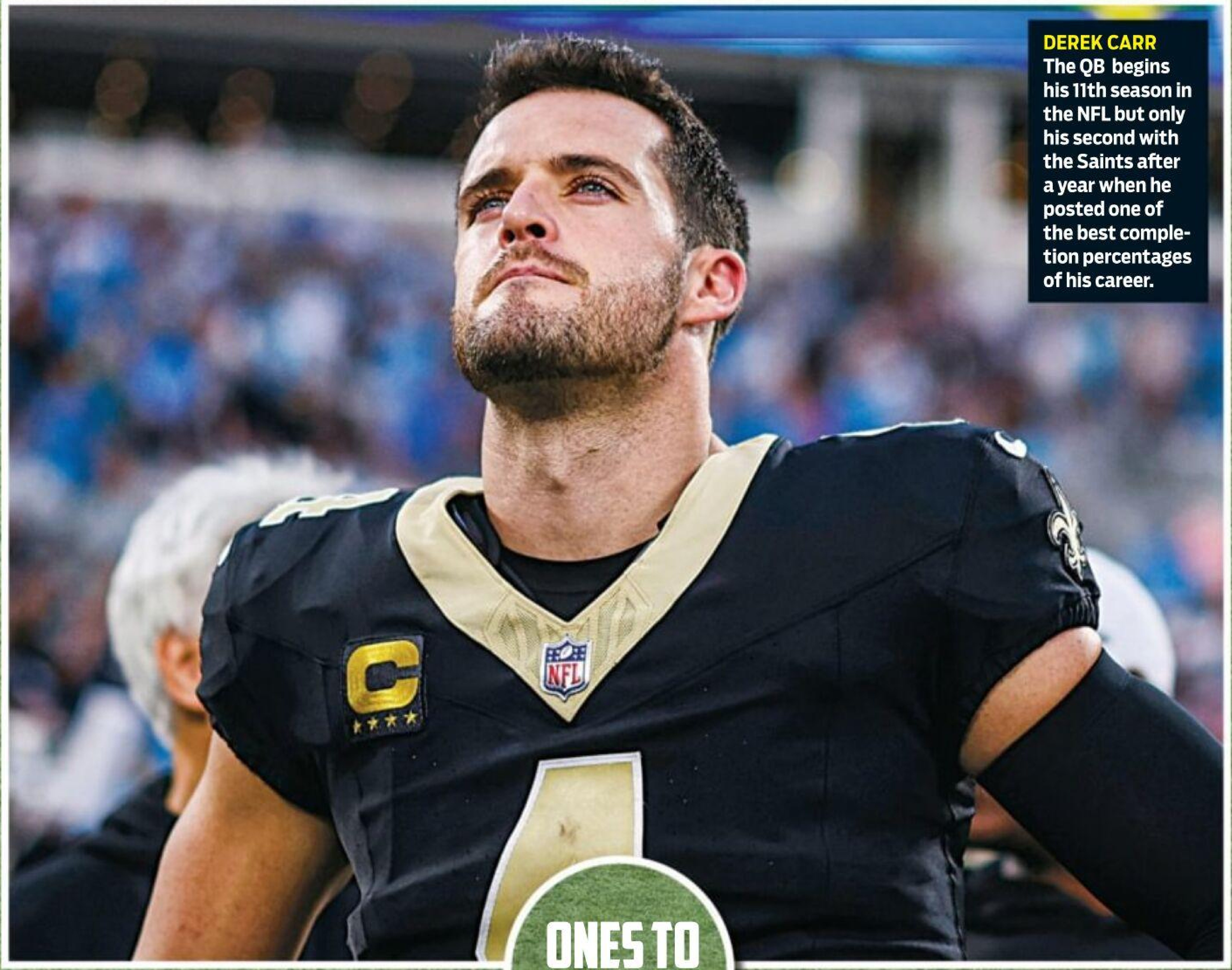
BAKER MAYFIELD Seven seasons in, the storied QB finally made the Pro Bowl, and after signing a contract extension, looks for another stellar year.



MIKE EVANS The WR and seventh overall pick of the 2014 draft has played his entire career for the Bucs and has never posted a season with fewer than 1,000 receiving yards.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: KEVIN SABITUS/GETTY IMAGES; MIKE CARLSON/GETTY IMAGES; KEVIN SABITUS/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH



DEREK CARR The QB begins his 11th season in the NFL but only his second with the Saints after a year when he posted one of the best completion percentages of his career.

DEMARIO DAVIS This will be season 13 for the venerable LB, who is playing some of his best football now, earning his first Pro Bowl berths each of the last two years.

RASHID SHAHEED The versatile WR earned Pro Bowl honors after gaining 1,479 yards last season as a receiver, rusher, and kick and punt returner.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: PERRY KNOTTS/GETTY IMAGES; DYLAN BUELL/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

NFC SOUTH

> **This is a vital year for head coach Dennis Allen in that if they don't make the playoffs, I think he could be [on the chopping block]. But I think he's capable.**
>
> **Chris Myers**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Dennis Allen
2023 Record 9–8, second in the division
2023 Home Record 5–3
2023 Away Record 4–5

Passing Leader Derek Carr, 548 attempts, 375 completions, 3,878 yards, 25 TDs, 8 interceptions, 31 sacks
Rushing Leader Alvin Kamara, 180 carries, 694 yards, 5 TDs
Receiving Leader Chris Olave, 87 receptions, 1,123 yards, 5 TDs
Defense Leaders Demario Davis, 121 tackles; Carl Granderson, 8.5 sacks; Paulson Adebo and Tyrann Mathieu, 4 interceptions each

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

The Saints won four of their last five games, including three division victories, to finish with the same record as the Bucs. They beat Tampa on the road in Week 17 to stay alive for a playoff spot heading into the final week of the regular season.

LOW POINT

The Saints were the odd team out, finishing with an identical overall record to the Bucs in the division as well as the Packers and Seahawks for the last wild card spot. They lost out on tiebreakers (their record against "common opponents" was worse than that of the Bucs, for instance) and missed the playoffs for a third straight season.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

Signed DE Chase Young (above) from the 49ers, OT Olisaemeka Udoh (Vikings), WR Cedrick Wilson Jr. (Dolphins) and LB Willie Gay (Kansas City). Drafted OT Taliese Fuaga from Oregon State in the first round.

LOSSES

QB Jameis Winston signed with the Browns, CB Isaac Yiadom signed with San Francisco, LB Zack Baun (Eagles).

LEFT: COOPER NEILL/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: JONATHAN BACHMAN/GETTY IMAGES

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

While not necessarily the high-flying offense of the Drew Brees era (which ended in 2020), the '23 Saints got better as the year went on. Chris Olave (right) has emerged as a top WR and QB Derek Carr, if healthy, "is capable of getting [things] done," says Fox Sports NFL analyst Chris Myers. "I think he needs a little more support."

DEFENSE

New Orleans needed pass rush help and signed Chase Young to a one-year, $13 million deal in the offseason. LB Demario Davis and safety Tyrann Mathieu, both on the other side of 30, had strong years but need to stay healthy for New Orleans to match last season's impressive plus-11 turnover differential.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Saints were strong in punt and kick coverage, and return man Rashid Shaheed was named AP first-team All-Pro as a punt returner.

SPARK PLUG

Taysom Hill, who's like a human Swiss Army knife, threw for a TD, ran for 4 and caught 2 last year. Expect even more this year as the team begins using more fullback-related plays. *—DT*

NFC SOUTH

ATLANTA FALCONS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

It's hard to believe, but a 24–10 season opening win over Carolina marked the first time the Falcons had a winning record at *any* point in a season since 2017. The following week, Atlanta came back from an 11-point fourth-quarter deficit to beat Green Bay 25–24.

LOW POINTS

After reaching a 6–6 record and a tie for first place in the hapless NFC South, the Falcons dropped four of their last five to fall out of the playoff picture. The margin of victory for their opponents in those losses? An average of 2-plus touchdowns. It's not good when your starting quarterback leads the league in number of fumbles lost.

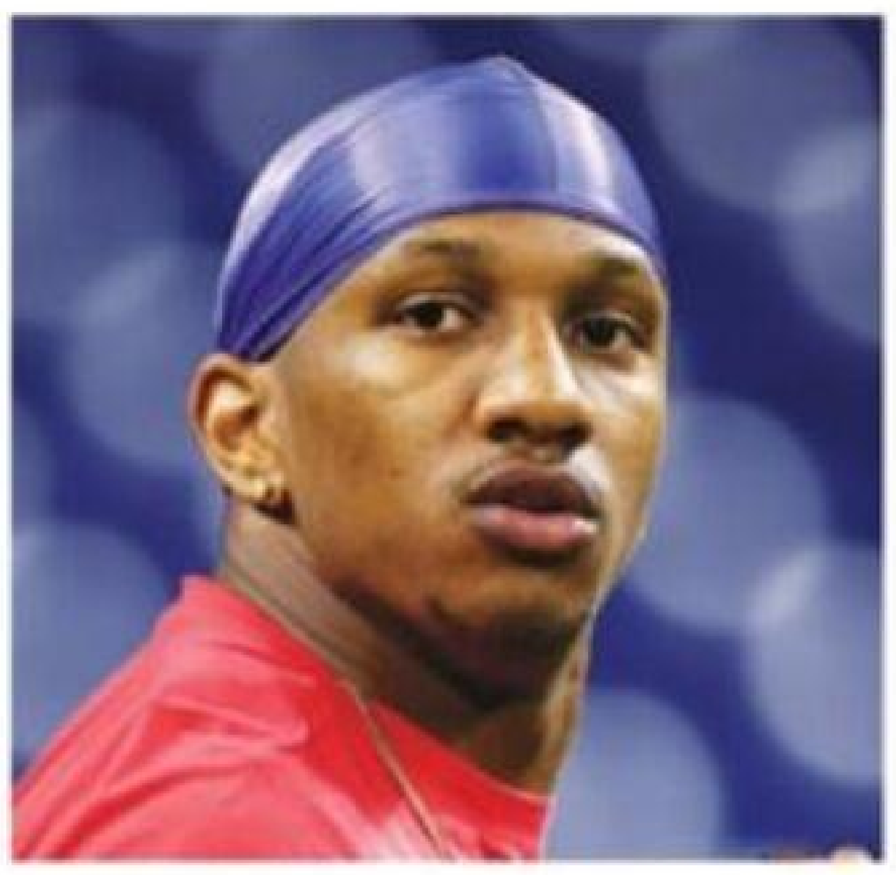
> **"This should be the best scoring team in the division and one of the best in football if Kirk Cousins stays healthy. But it's a bit of a drama story in the QB room."**
>
> **Chris Myers**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Raheem Morris
2023 Record 7–10, third in the division
2023 Home Record 5–3
2023 Away Record 2–7

Passing Leader Desmond Ridder, 388 attempts, 249 completions, 2,836 yards, 12 TDs, 12 interceptions, 31 sacks
Rushing Leader Bijan Robinson, 214 carries, 976 yards, 4 TDs
Receiving Leader Drake London, 69 receptions, 905 yards, 2 TDs
Defense Leaders Jessie Bates III, 132 tackles; Calais Campbell and Bud Dupree, 6.5 sacks; Jessie Bates III, 6 interceptions

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL



GAINS

Signed QB Kirk Cousins from the Vikings, then used the eighth draft pick on Washington QB Michael Penix Jr. (above); signed WR Darnell Mooney (from the Bears), TE Charlie Woerner (49ers) and CB Antonio Hamilton (Cardinals).

LOSSES

TE Jonnu Smith, WR Mack Hollins (released, signed with the Bills), CB Jeff Okudah (signed with the Texans) DE Calais Campbell (Dolphins).

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

Veteran QB Kirk Cousins joins an offense ready to take the next step, with talented skill players across the board including WR Drake London (right), RB Bijan Robinson and TE Kyle Pitts.

DEFENSE

New defensive coordinator Jimmy Lake will take over a squad that finished with only 8 interceptions last year—with 6 alone coming from safety Jessie Bates III. Atlanta prioritized defensive linemen and linebackers in the draft, which was a big reason 37-year-old DE Calais Campbell—who surpassed 100 career sacks last year—signed with the Dolphins.

SPECIAL TEAMS

"They have a terrific kicker in Younghoe Koo," says Fox NFL analyst Chris Myers. Koo remains among the top kickers of the last five years, ranking fourth in field goals made over that span. He also has the all-time fourth-highest field goal percentage.

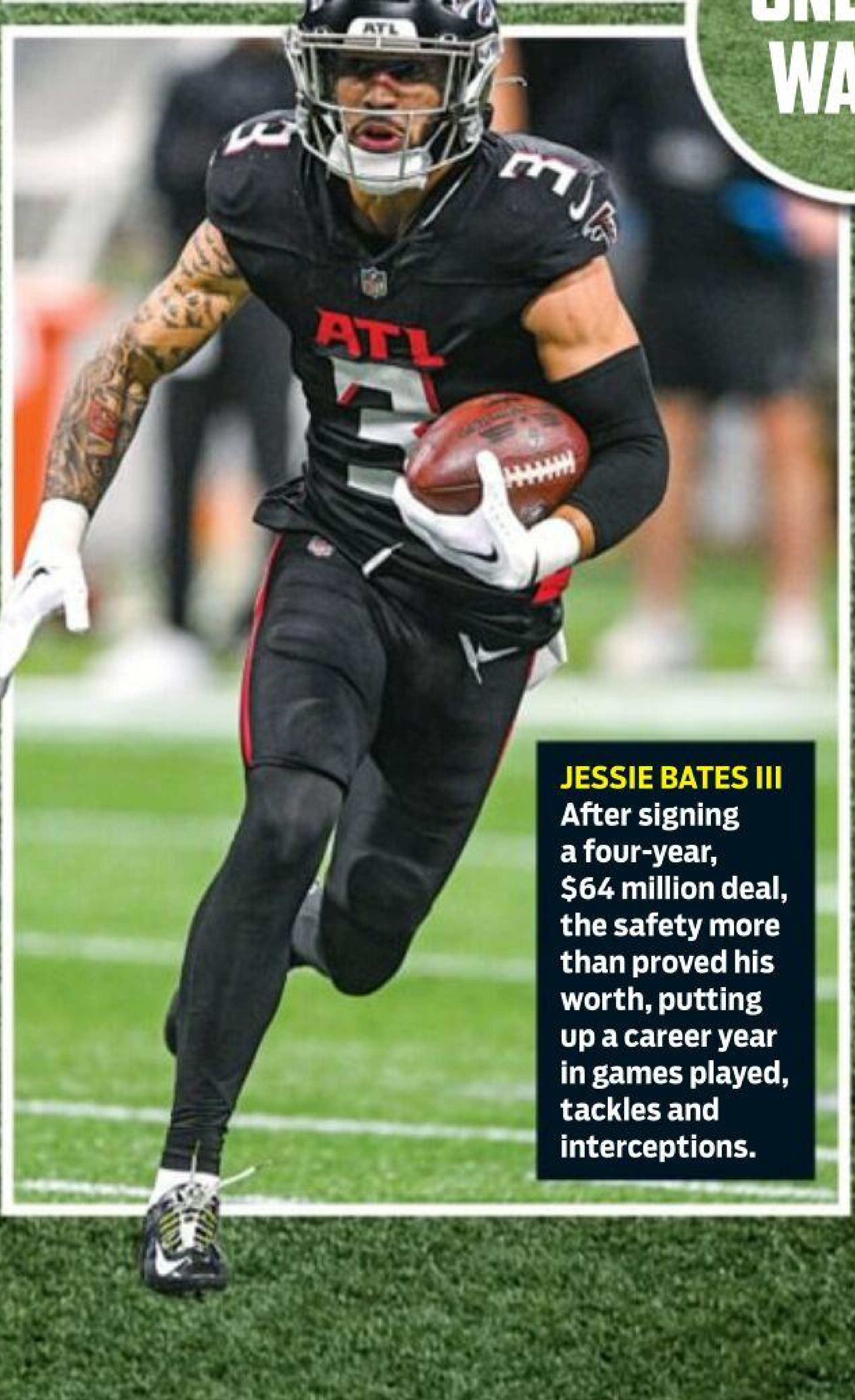
SPARK PLUG

While 24-year-old RB Tyler Allgeier's numbers were lower last year compared to his 1,000-yard rookie campaign, he may have more space to maneuver as new offensive coordinator Zac Robinson plans a better attack for 2024. Last year's team was predictable, rushing more than all but two teams in the league. *—DT*

LEFT: KEVIN SABITUS/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: ALEX SLITZ/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH

KIRK COUSINS
The Falcons begin the season with great wealth at quarterback, starting with the four-time Pro Bowler who has led two teams to the playoffs.



JESSIE BATES III
After signing a four-year, $64 million deal, the safety more than proved his worth, putting up a career year in games played, tackles and interceptions.

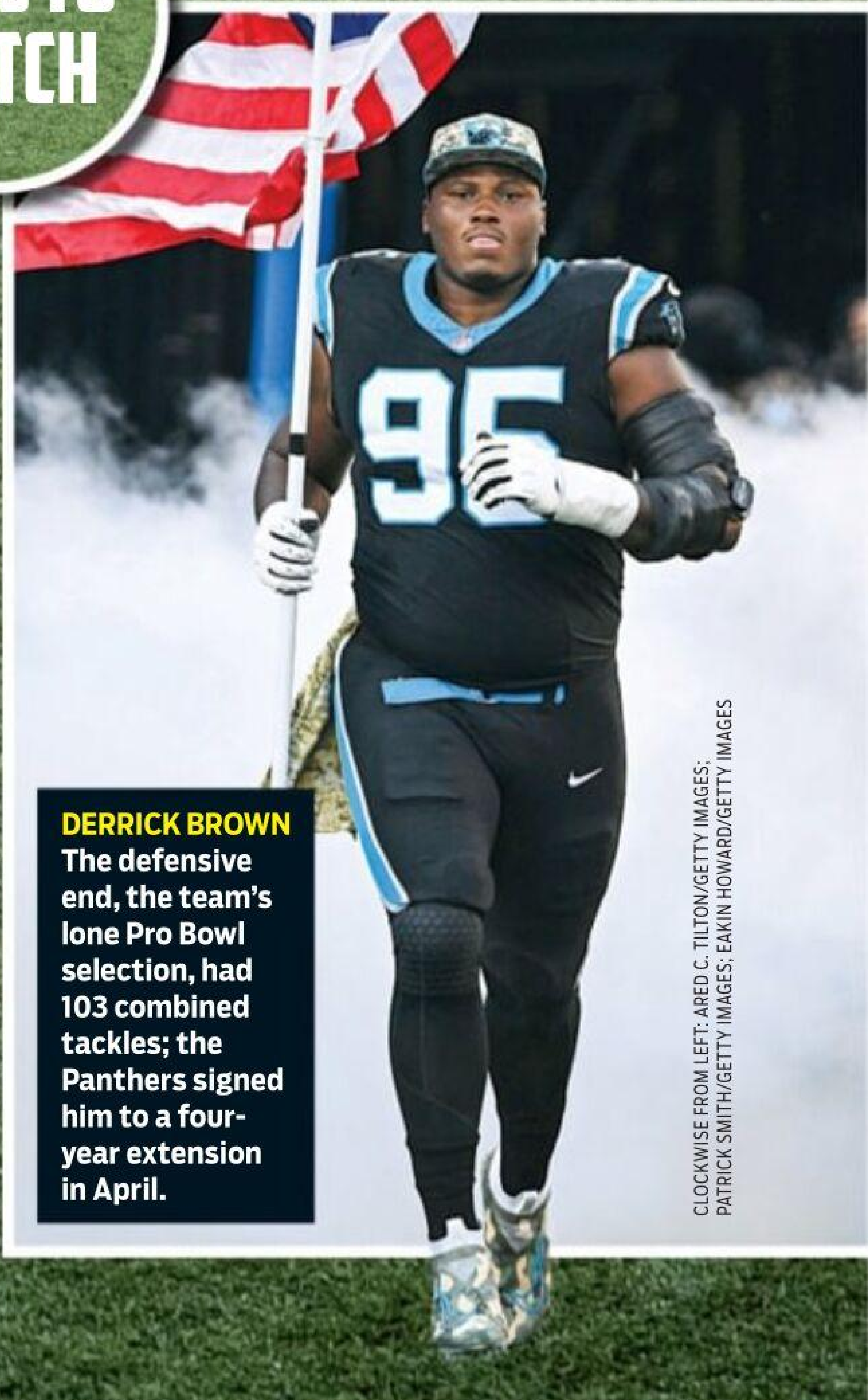
BIJAN ROBINSON
The RB, Atlanta's highest draft pick in 2023, earned All Rookie Team honors and added 58 receptions for 487 yards to his rushing total.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: SCOTT TAETSCH/GETTY IMAGES; JUSTIN CASTERLINE/GETTY IMAGES; RICH VON BIBERSTEIN/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH

BRYCE YOUNG The Panthers' great QB hope had little chance of thriving given his 62 sacks for a league-leading 477 lost yards, but better protection in 2024 will help a lot.

DIONTAE JOHNSON Slowed by a hamstring injury last season, the WR comes to Carolina from Pittsburgh and gives Bryce Young another swift target.



DERRICK BROWN The defensive end, the team's lone Pro Bowl selection, had 103 combined tackles; the Panthers signed him to a four-year extension in April.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: ARED C. TILTON/GETTY IMAGES; PATRICK SMITH/GETTY IMAGES; EAKIN HOWARD/GETTY IMAGES

CAROLINA PANTHERS

NFC SOUTH

> **New head coach Dave Canales is one of the most positive people you'll ever be around. I think he will bring Bryce Young fast-forward to his true talent.**
>
> Chris Myers

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Dave Canales
2023 Record 2–15, last in the division
2023 Home Record 2–6
2023 Away Record 0–9

Passing Leader Bryce Young, 527 attempts, 315 completions, 2,877 yards, 11 TDs, 10 interceptions, 62 sacks
Rushing Leader Chuba Hubbard, 238 carries, 902 yards, 5 TDs
Receiving Leader Adam Thielen, 103 receptions, 1,014 yards, 4 TDs
Defense Leaders Frankie Luvu, 125 tackles; Brian Burns, 8 sacks; Xavier Woods, 2 interceptions

2023 WRAP-UP

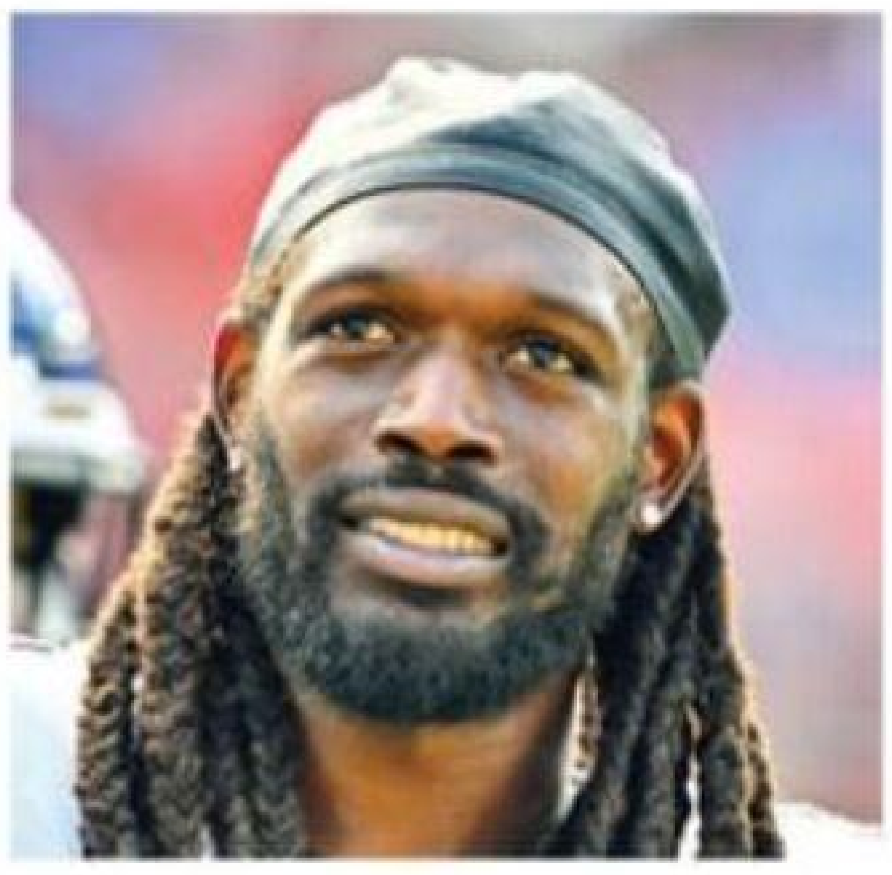
HIGH POINT

Bryce Young, last season's No. 1 draft pick, couldn't escape the shadow of the No. 2 pick—Texans Pro Bowl QB C.J. Stroud—but Young did pick up his first career victory against the Texans passer in Week 8. Eddy Pineiro's field goal with three seconds left gave Carolina the 15–13 win over Houston.

LOW POINTS

The dismal Panthers put up 0 points in both of their last two regular season games, becoming the first team to record back-to-back shutouts in 15 years. Still, with the worst record in football, at least they'd get the first pick in the 2024 draft, right? Nope. They'd traded it to Chicago the year prior to draft Young.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL



GAINS

WR Diontae Johnson (trade with Pittsburgh), LB Jadeveon Clowney (above, signed from the Ravens), OG Robert Hunt (signed from Miami) and WR Xavier Legette (drafted, first round, from South Carolina).

LOSSES

LB Brian Burns (traded to the Giants), TE Hayden Hurst (released, signed with Chargers), LB Frankie Luvu (signed with Washington).

LEFT: JASON MILLER/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: GRANT HALVERSON/GETTY IMAGES

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

Job one for head coach Dave Canales has been to get QB Bryce Young better protection. Injuries at guard left the offense depleted with Young trying to get the ball to receivers such as two-time Pro Bowler Adam Thielen (below), who still had one of his best-ever years. Things can only get better from here!

DEFENSE

"They're going to miss linebackers Brian Burns and Frankie Luvu," says Fox Sports NFL analyst Chris Myers. "Their defense wore down because they were on the field so much." DE Derrick Brown remains for a squad that just tried to stay competitive.

SPECIAL TEAMS

It was painful. Kicker Eddy Pineiro had the worst extra-point percentage in the NFL, making just 85 percent once Carolina found the end zone.

SPARK PLUG

Panthers fans are hoping last year was simply a very bumpy takeoff and that Bryce Young will benefit from new wide receivers Diontae Johnson and Xavier Legette and a much more beefed up offensive line. If Young's true talent doesn't emerge, the draft pick (and everything the Panthers gave up to get him) could start looking like an all-time blunder. *—DT*

NFC WEST

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

The Super Bowl runners-up were fueled by an explosive offense, relying on talented receivers Brandon Aiyuk and Deebo Samuel Sr., tight end George Kittle and incredibly versatile RB Christian McCaffrey. And don't forget "Mr. Seriously Relevant," QB Brock Purdy, who went from last man picked in the 2022 draft to the Pro Bowl in 2024.

LOW POINTS

The team sputtered through a three-game midseason slide after ripping off five straight victories to start the year. Talent won out though and the team returned to the Super Bowl to face a Chiefs squad that took them down in 2020...only to come up short, 25–22.

> **"They have the players and the coaches—everything but the ring. The window is closing. This is their last, best shot."**
>
> **Andrew Whitworth**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Kyle Shanahan
2023 Record 12–5, NFC Champs, lost to the Chiefs in Super Bowl LVIII
2023 Home Record 5–3
2023 Away Record 7–2

Passing Leader Brock Purdy, 444 attempts, 308 completions, 4,280 yards, 31 TDs, 11 interceptions, 28 sacks
Rushing Leader Christian McCaffrey, 272 carries, 1,459 yards, 14 TDs
Receiving Leader Brandon Aiyuk, 75 receptions, 1,342 yards, 7 TDs
Defense Leaders Fred Warner, 132 tackles; Nick Bosa, 10.5 sacks; Charvarius Ward, 5 interceptions

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

DE Leonard Floyd (above), who had 10.5 sacks last season, signed as a free agent from Buffalo; LB De'Vondre Campbell, with 75 tackles last season playing for Green Bay. First draft pick: WR Ricky Pearsall (Round 1) from Florida.

LOSSES

DE Arik Armstead, who signed as a free agent with the Jaguars; another DE, Chase Young, who signed as a free agent with the Saints.

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

"The Niners hung on to the best offensive players in the league for one more run," according to Amazon Prime Video analyst and former Rams Pro Bowl offensive tackle Andrew Whitworth. "It's championship or bust for this group," especially with contract concerns for receiving leader Brandon Aiyuk. There are plenty of other names to cite, including one of the league's consummate fullbacks, eight-time Pro Bowler Kyle Juszczyk (right).

DEFENSE

"They had some big holes to fill here with the loss of Arik Armstead and Chase Young on the D-line," Whitworth says, citing salary cap issues. "Armstead set the tone for leadership last year and the torch has to pass to [DE Nick Bosa]."

SPECIAL TEAMS

"This has never been a primary focus for the 49ers, and it has cost them," Whitworth says. "They had a muffed punt in the Super Bowl that helped the Chiefs win. It will need to be better."

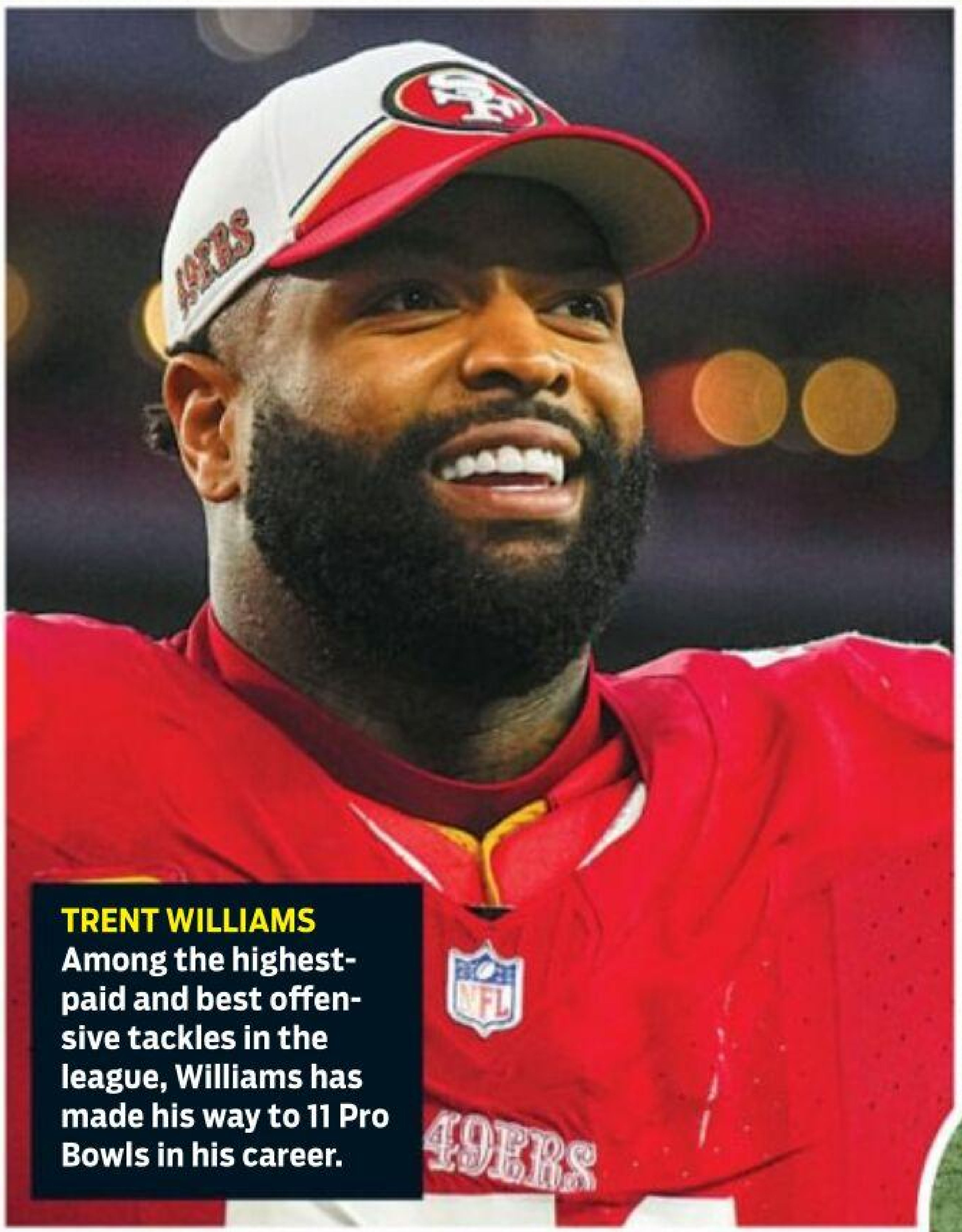
SPARK PLUG

"Is there anything Christian McCaffrey can't do?" Whitworth wonders of the running back who piled up more than 2,000 yards on the ground and receiving in a stellar Pro Bowl 2023.

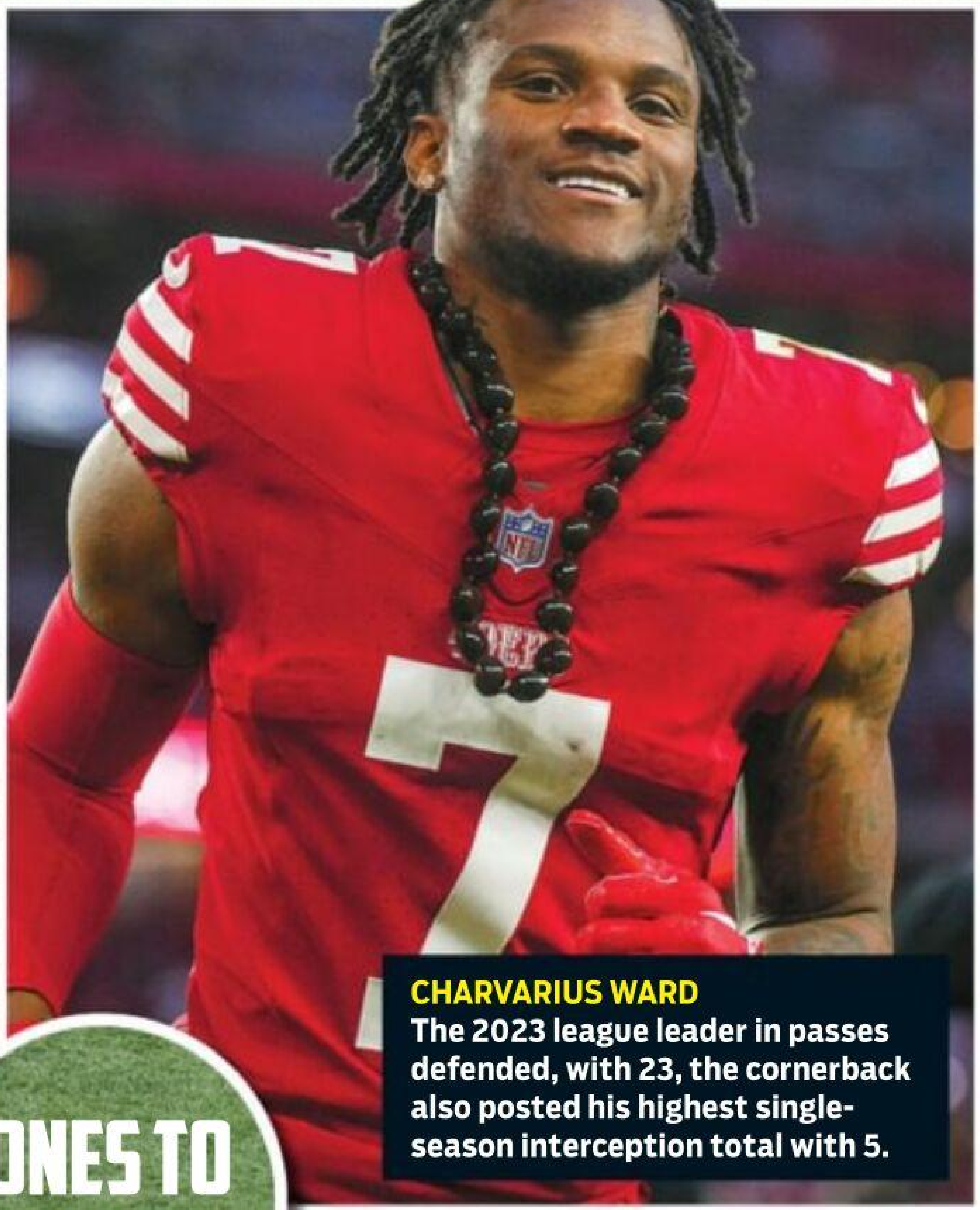
—Mike Hammer

LEFT: FRANK JANSKY/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES RIGHT: THEARON W. HENDERSON/GETTY IMAGES

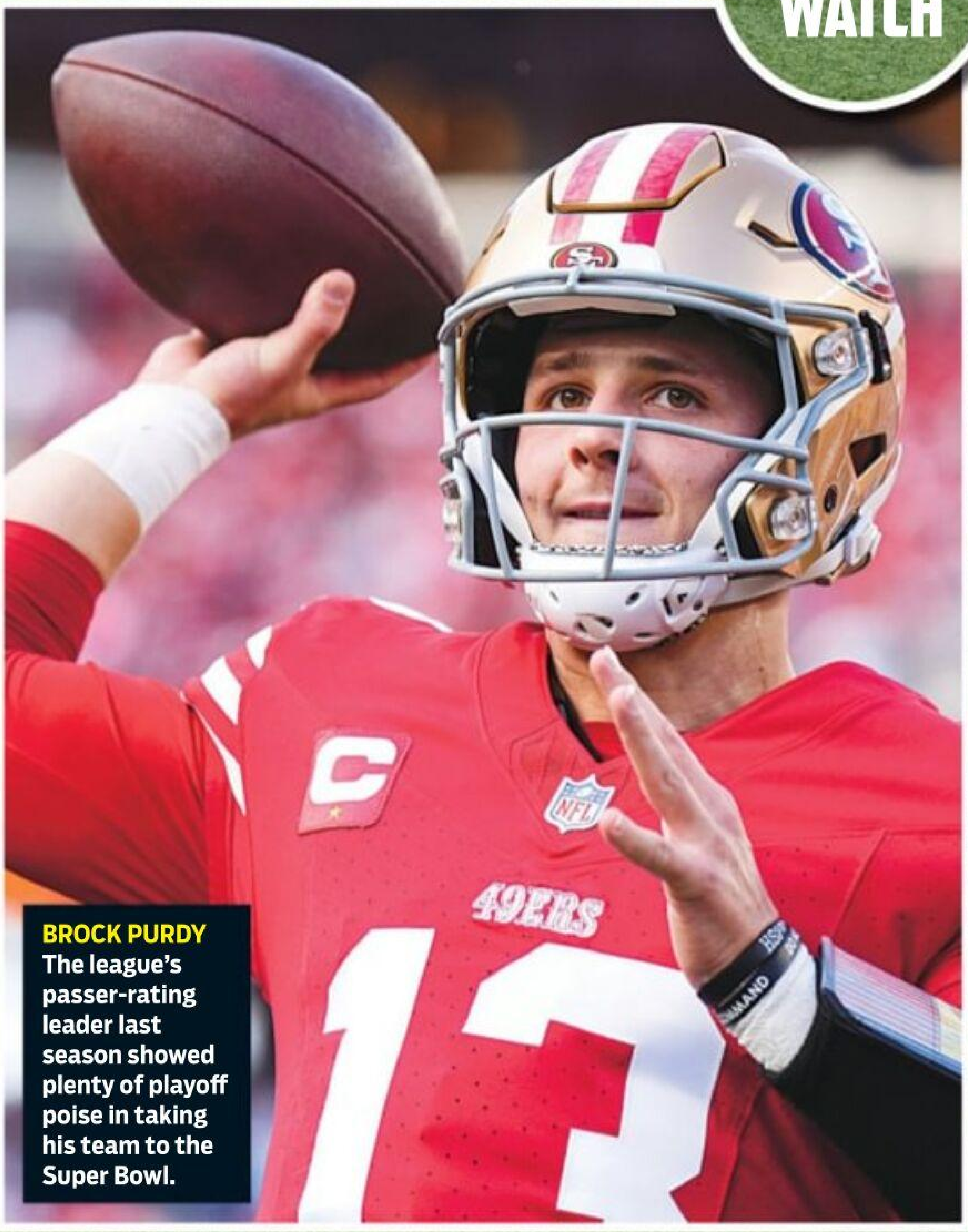
ONES TO WATCH



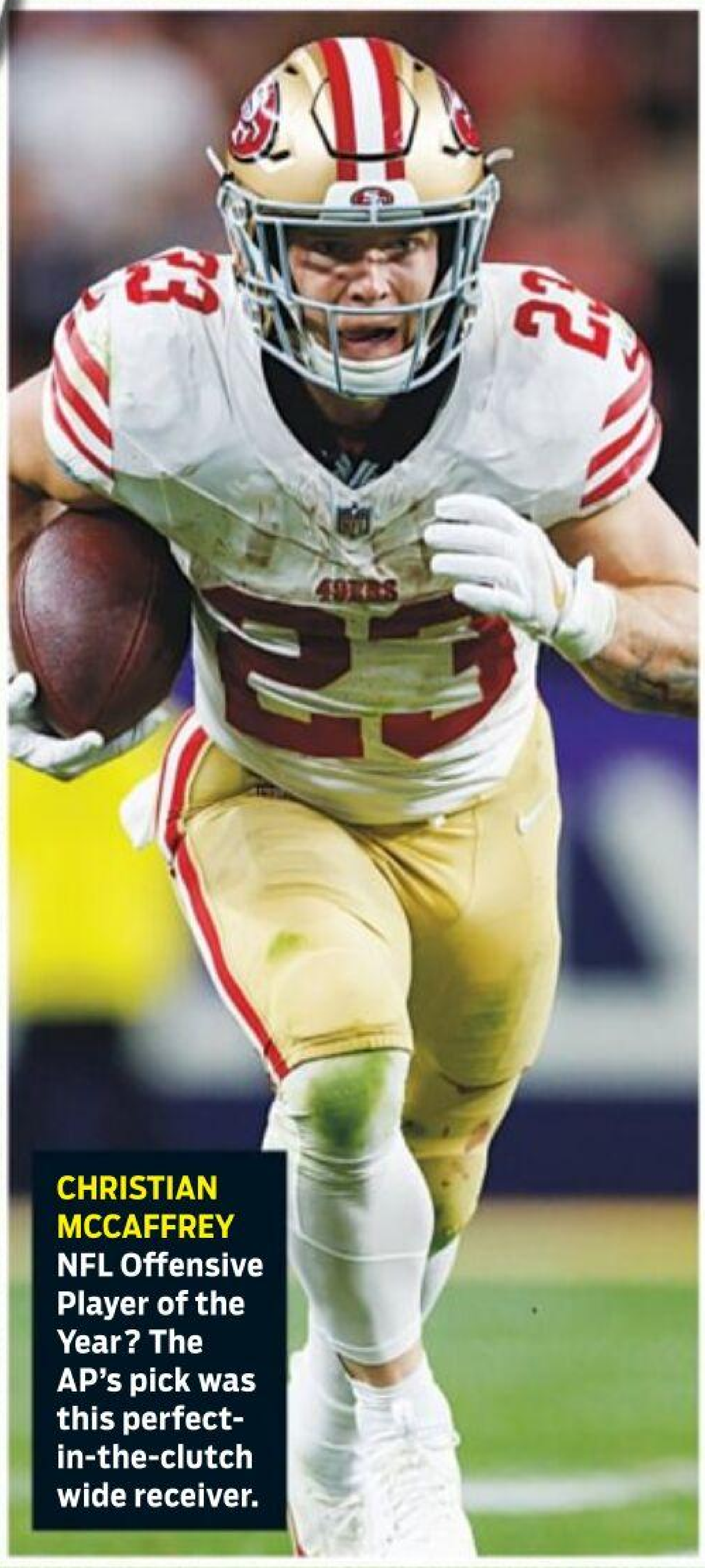
TRENT WILLIAMS
Among the highest-paid and best offensive tackles in the league, Williams has made his way to 11 Pro Bowls in his career.



CHARVARIUS WARD
The 2023 league leader in passes defended, with 23, the cornerback also posted his highest single-season interception total with 5.



BROCK PURDY
The league's passer-rating leader last season showed plenty of playoff poise in taking his team to the Super Bowl.

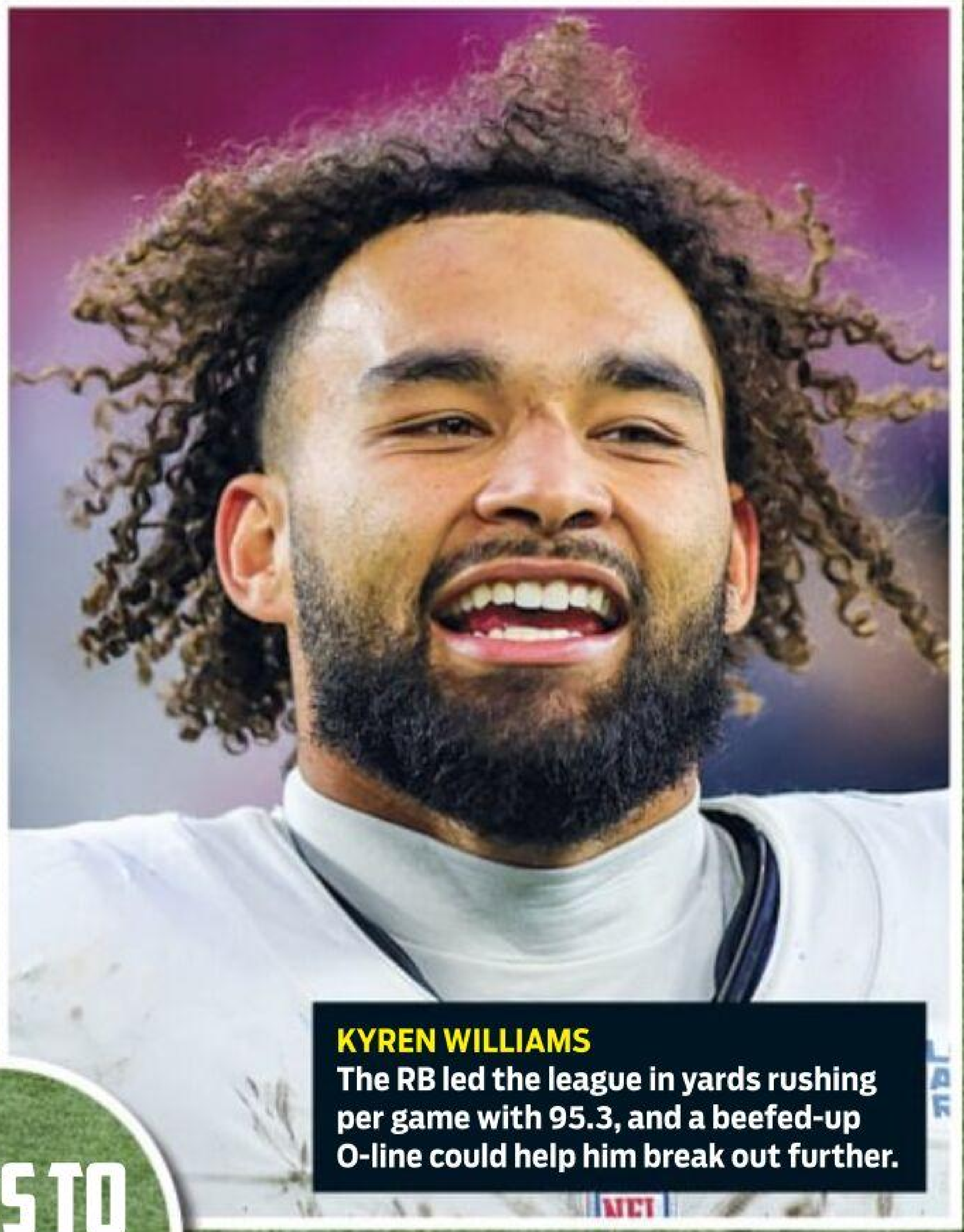


CHRISTIAN MCCAFFREY
NFL Offensive Player of the Year? The AP's pick was this perfect-in-the-clutch wide receiver.

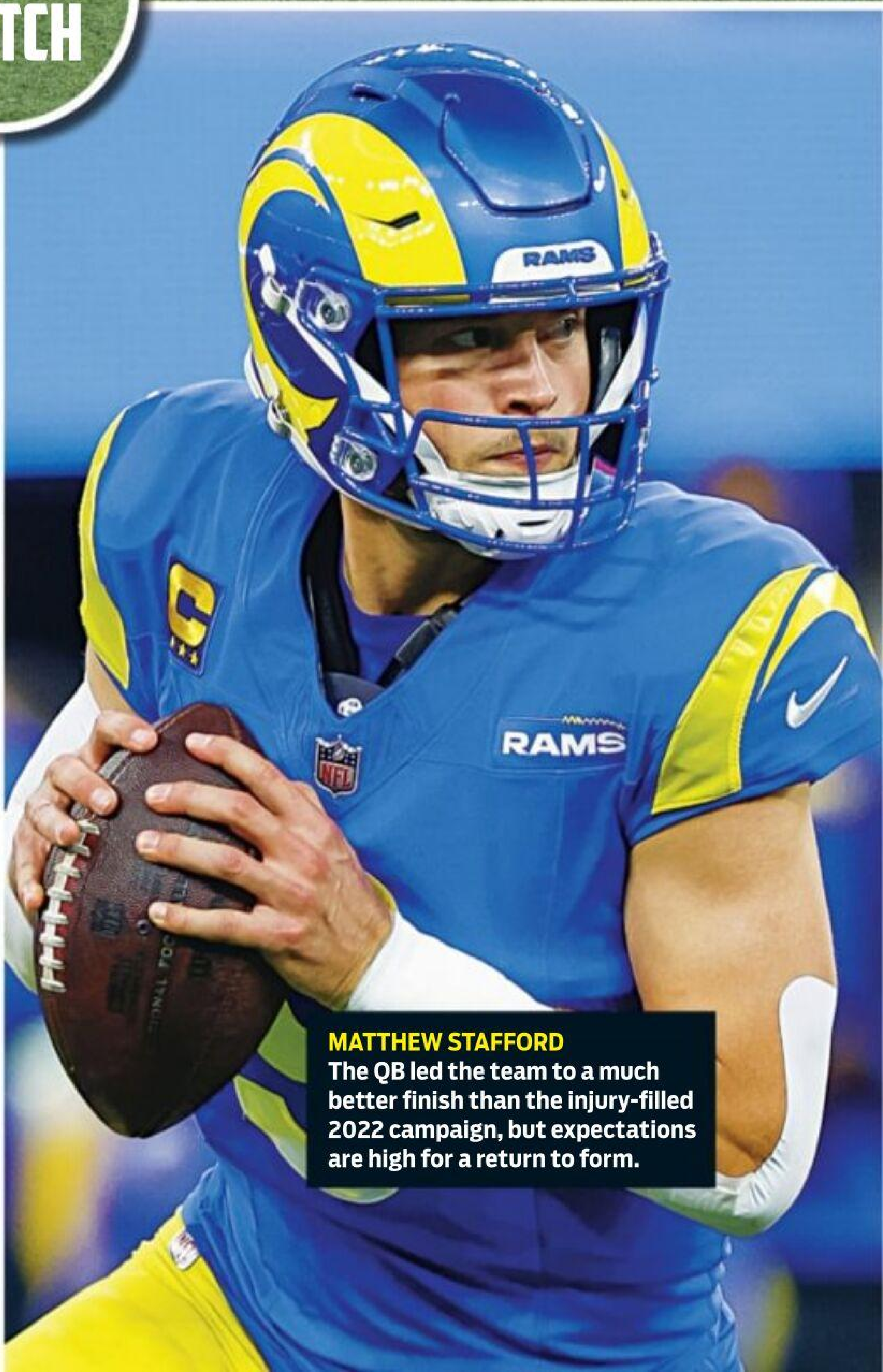
CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: COOPER NEILL/GETTY IMAGES (3); RYAN KANG/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH

PUKA NACUA
The incomparable WR set NFL records for most receptions and yards ever by a rookie and helped out tremendously in a season that started with Cooper Kupp injured.



KYREN WILLIAMS
The RB led the league in yards rushing per game with 95.3, and a beefed-up O-line could help him break out further.



MATTHEW STAFFORD
The QB led the team to a much better finish than the injury-filled 2022 campaign, but expectations are high for a return to form.

LOS ANGELES RAMS

NFC WEST

> “The big question is, with [legendary DT] Aaron Donald gone, what does the defense look like? But with the new guys they got, the answer is, pretty good!”
>
> **Andrew Whitworth**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Sean McVay
2023 Record 10–7, second place in the division, lost to Detroit in NFC Wild Card
2023 Home Record 5–3
2023 Away Record 5–4

Passing Leader Matthew Stafford, 521 attempts, 326 completions, 3,965 yards, 24 TDs, 11 interceptions, 30 sacks
Rushing Leader Kyren Williams, 228 carries, 1,144 yards, 12 TDs
Receiving Leader Puka Nacua, 105 receptions, 1,486 yards, 6 TDs
Defense Leaders Ernest Jones IV, 145 tackles, 4.5 sacks; Ahkello Witherspoon and Jordan Fuller, 3 interceptions each

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINT

Last year was a big bounce back when the Rams galloped into the playoffs as a wild card team by going 7–1 in their last eight regular season games. After beating the Giants on New Year’s Eve, the Rams earned their spot thanks to another strong season from quarterback Matthew Stafford.

LOW POINT

Stafford led the Rams to Detroit, where he played for mostly bad teams the first 12 years of his career, in a QB face-off with Jared Goff, the man the Rams traded to get him. The back-and-forth brawl ended in a heartbreaking 1-point loss, despite Stafford completing a heroic 25 of 36 passes.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

CB Darious Williams, who netted 53 tackles and 4 interceptions last season with Jacksonville; Kamren Curl, a 6-foot-2 safety with 115 tackles last season for Washington; OG Jonah Jackson (above), who signed from Detroit.

LOSSES

Future Hall of Fame DT Aaron Donald, who retired after 10 seasons; RB Royce Freeman, who signed a free agent contract with Dallas.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: JORGE LEMUS/NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES; JORDON KELLY/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES; RYAN KANG/GETTY IMAGES; LAUREN LEIGH BACHO/GETTY IMAGES; BRANDON SLOTER/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

While all the talk is about Stafford, Cooper Kupp (right) and breakout star Puka Nacua, the Rams re-signing guard Kevin Dotson and signing Jonah Jackson may mean as potent a ground game as in the air. “Stafford has a powerful line to keep him on his feet long enough to throw,” says Amazon Prime Video analyst Andrew Whitworth. “You’ve got something special brewing again in L.A.”

DEFENSE

“The backfield has been shored up with former Ram Darious Williams back from the Jags to join with Kamren Curl to provide toughness and leadership,” Whitworth says. Plus, drafting Florida State’s Jared Verse and Braden Fiske will help ease the pain of losing Donald.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Things should settle down thanks to highly regarded special teams coordinator Chase Blackburn, Whitworth says. “The players respect his knowledge and experience.” Plus, drafting Stanford kicker Joshua Karty may add stability to that position.

SPARK PLUG

“It all revolves around Stafford,” according to Whitworth. “They are surrounding him with weapons and protection. Now he has the ammo to pull the trigger on a title run.” *—MH*

NFC WEST

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

The 'Hawks continue to gain altitude with a core of young talent, finishing over .500 for the second straight season since bidding farewell to QB Russell Wilson. Two rookies—cornerback Devon Witherspoon and wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba—both emerged as stars on a team that showed it was poised to reach greater heights.

LOW POINTS

Quarterback Geno Smith had a step-back season from his Comeback Player of the Year campaign—mostly because he was running for his life on nearly every snap! Smith was pressured on 40 percent of his drop-backs; when he wasn't, performance improved.

> **“Combine the many young players and a new coach with a new scheme and you're looking at a year with painful growth spurts.”**
>
> **Andrew Whitworth**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Mike Macdonald
2023 Record 9–8, third place in the division
2023 Home Record 5–3
2023 Away Record 4–5

Passing Leader Geno Smith, 499 attempts, 323 completions, 3,624 yards, 20 TDs, 9 interceptions, 31 sacks
Rushing Leader Kenneth Walker III, 219 carries, 905 yards, 8 TDs
Receiving Leader Tyler Lockett, 79 receptions, 894 yards, 5 TDs
Defense Leaders Bobby Wagner, 183 tackles; Boye Mafe, 9 sacks; Julian Love, 4 interceptions

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

Seattle gained the draft's first DT—Byron Murphy II, a 6-foot, 297-pound force from Texas—with the 16th pick; safety Rayshawn Jenkins from the Jaguars.

LOSSES

Legendary college and pro coach Pete Carroll, who logged 14 years with the Seahawks, winning Super Bowl XLVIII and making the playoffs 10 seasons. The coaching change set them back a bit.

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

They have great pieces with receiver DK Metcalf and quarterback Geno Smith, “who's trying to bounce back from a season where he was target practice for defenses because of the holes in the offensive line,” says Amazon Prime Video analyst Andrew Whitworth, who believes that, despite additions to the O-line, “it'll be another long year for Geno.”

DEFENSE

“New coach Mike Macdonald was a guru at Baltimore, but he won't be riding the same horses here,” Whitworth says. Re-signing DE Leonard Williams (right) was a must, “and it'll be interesting to see what kind of results Macdonald will get with lesser or younger talent.”

SPECIAL TEAMS

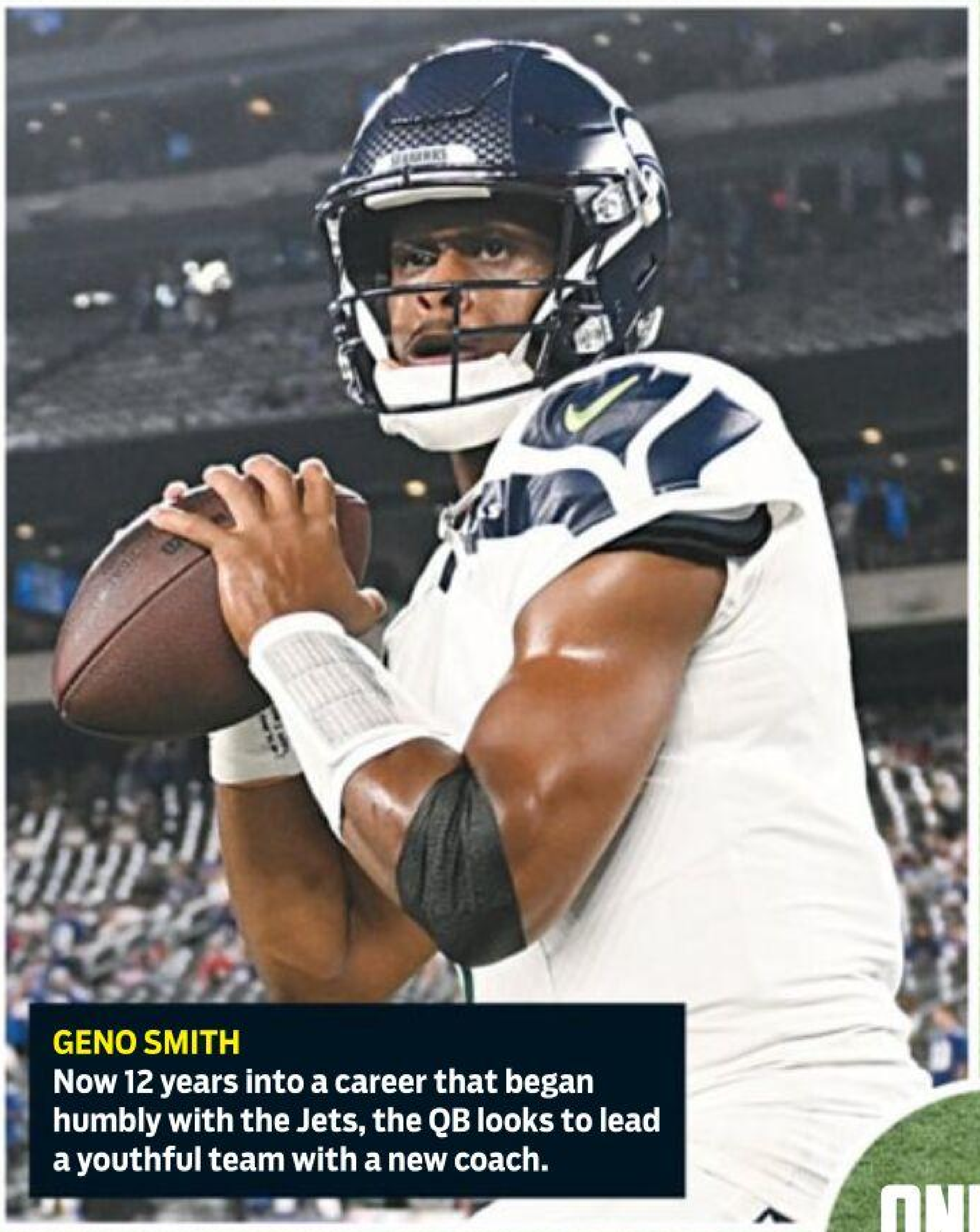
Jay Harbaugh joins the Seahawks to make his mark on the NFL after dad Jim's departure from Michigan to coach the Chargers. Jay's fresh bag of tricks could confuse opponents this season.

SPARK PLUG

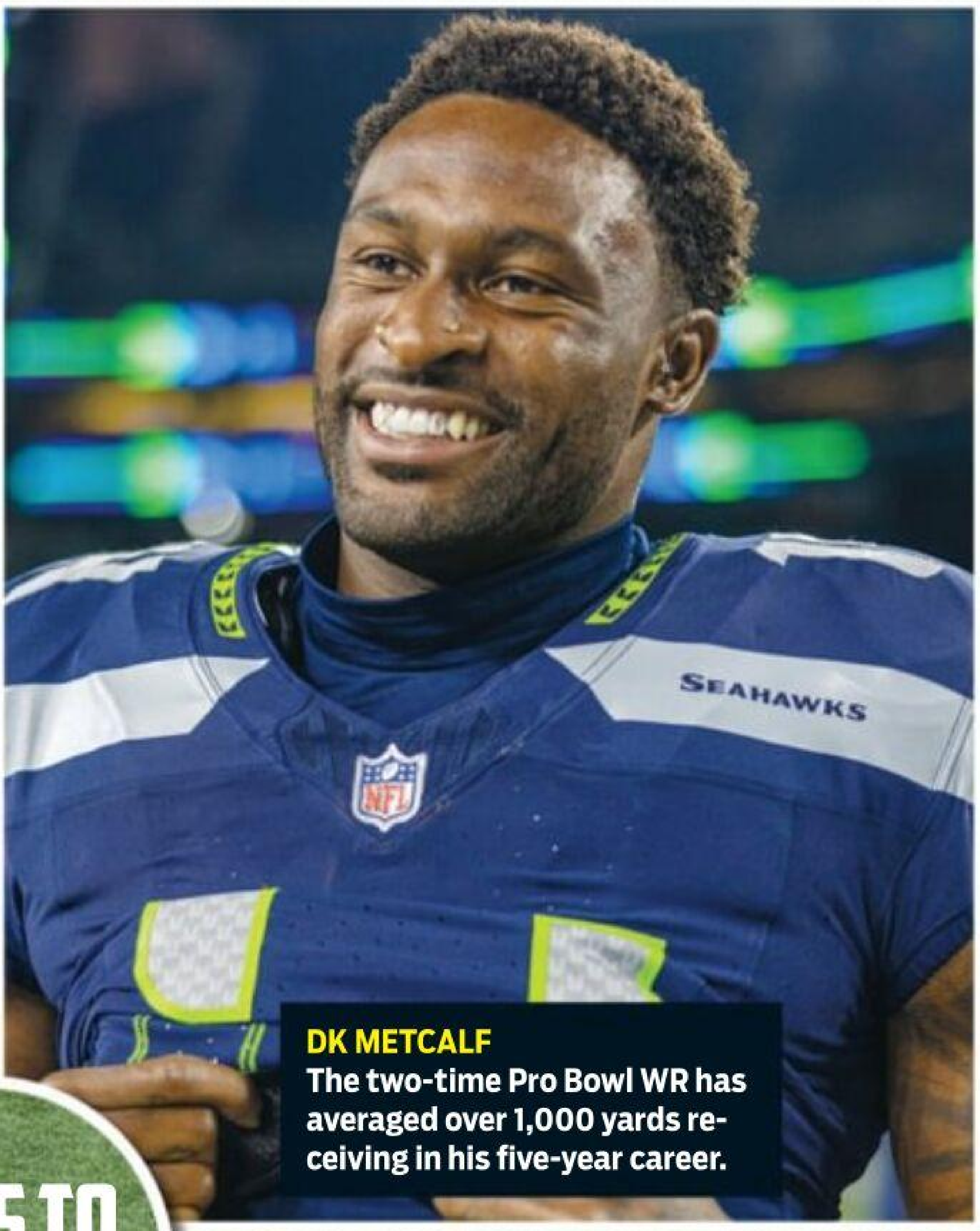
“Their receivers are special,” Whitworth says of Smith's top targets for 2024. “Tyler Lockett is consistent, but DK Metcalf is big, strong and overpowering on defensive backs. He can take over any game.” *—MH*

LEFT: STEPH CHAMBERS/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: RYAN KANG/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH



GENO SMITH
Now 12 years into a career that began humbly with the Jets, the QB looks to lead a youthful team with a new coach.



DK METCALF
The two-time Pro Bowl WR has averaged over 1,000 yards receiving in his five-year career.

RIQ WOOLEN AND DEVON WITHERSPOON
Woolen (27) was an All-Rookie Team finalist in 2022; his CB compatriot Witherspoon had that honor in 2023. They'll give passers fits in 2024.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: KATHRYN RILEY/GETTY IMAGES; TOM HAUCK/GETTY IMAGES; STEPH CHAMBERS/GETTY IMAGES

ONES TO WATCH

JAMES CONNER
Despite a knee injury, the running back had a career season in his seventh year in the league, rushing for over 1,000 yards for the first time.

BUDDA BAKER
The terrific safety, who comes off a hamstring injury in 2023, made the Pro Bowl for six of his seven seasons in the league.

KYLER MURRAY
Will 2024 finally be the year the first pick of the 2019 draft has all the parts in place? He'll have an elite wide receiver target in his sights.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM: RYAN KANG/GETTY IMAGES; KATHRYN RILEY/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL OWENS/GETTY IMAGES

ARIZONA CARDINALS

NFC WEST

> **Marvin Harrison will prove to be the Ferrari that finally drives this team. He can change the direction of an entire franchise.**
>
> **Andrew Whitworth**

STAT LEADERS

Head Coach Jonathan Gannon
2023 Record 4–13, last place in the division
2023 Home Record 2–6
2023 Away Record 2–7

Passing Leader Kyler Murray, 268 attempts, 176 completions, 1,799 yards, 10 TDs, 5 interceptions, 18 sacks
Rushing Leader James Conner, 208 carries, 1,040 yards, 7 TDs
Receiving Leader Trey McBride, 81 receptions, 825 yards, 3 TDs
Defense Leaders Kyzir White, 90 tackles; Dennis Gardeck, 6 sacks; Jalen Thompson, 4 interceptions

2023 WRAP-UP

HIGH POINTS

In Week 3, behind QB Joshua Dobbs, the Cards smacked down the mighty Cowboys. It wasn't a sign of things to come. With just four wins to their credit in 2023, the only thing that came up aces for the Cards was that they wound up with the fourth pick in the draft—and Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. was still there for the taking!

LOW POINT

The team's first overall pick in 2019 hasn't lived up to expectations. Quarterback Kyler Murray's shoulder cannon was holstered when he went down with a torn ACL that kept him out until the 10th game of the season, and by then the Cards were long counted out.

OFFSEASON PERSONNEL

GAINS

Draft pick Marvin Harrison Jr., WR from Ohio State, will make an impact; CB Sean Murphy-Bunting was picked up from the Titans. OT Jonah Williams (above) signed from the Bengals.

LOSSES

Defensive tackle Leki Fotu, who had 2.5 sacks last season, signed with the Jets; WR Marquise "Hollywood" Brown upgraded by signing with the champion Chiefs.

LEFT: COOPER NEILL/GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: AARON J. THORNTON/GETTY IMAGES

2024 OUTLOOK >>

Assessment from the experts

OFFENSE

"This is a make-or-break year for Kyler Murray. They've handed him the ultimate weapon," says Amazon Prime Video analyst Andrew Whitworth, citing wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. (right). "The offensive line will be a strength with Paris Johnson Jr., who moved from right to left tackle, paired with Jonah Williams," a free agent acquisition.

DEFENSE

"The D is stronger this year after drafting cornerback Max Melton out of Rutgers and combining him with vets they picked up," says Whitworth. "They also bulked up the line," but can they get to the quarterback? "They will get torched if there's no rush in the pits."

SPECIAL TEAMS

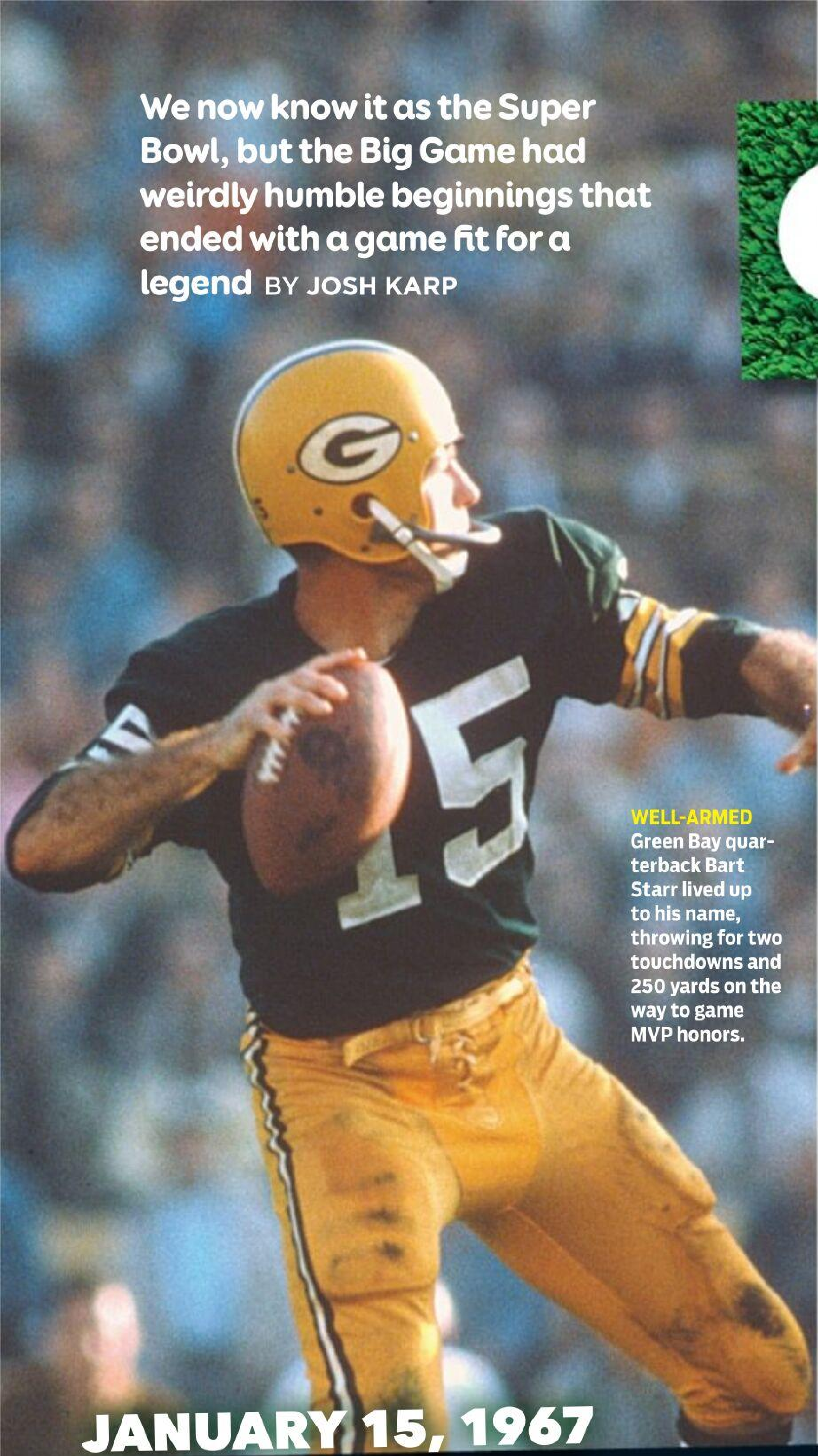
Adding linebacker Mack Wilson (from the Patriots) to the return team will help, says Whitworth, "but it comes down to having a good kicker and punter, and that's gonna be a challenge here."

SPARK PLUG

Harrison is destined to be the man. Says Whitworth, "This is the guy they wanted, and he's a generational player." He also thinks safety Budda Baker, "who flies all over the field," serves the same critical role on the other side of the ball. *—MH*

GAME

We now know it as the Super Bowl, but the Big Game had weirdly humble beginnings that ended with a game fit for a legend BY JOSH KARP



WELL-ARMED Green Bay quarterback Bart Starr lived up to his name, throwing for two touchdowns and 250 yards on the way to game MVP honors.

THESE DAYS WE celebrate Super Bowl Sunday as a national holiday, and this past February the Big Game was played in front of a global audience of nearly 200 million. But it's worth noting that this event began life nearly 60 years ago, in a game pitting the legendary Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers, led by quarterback Bart Starr, against the upstart Kansas City Chiefs and their star QB Len Dawson.

That contest, on January 15, 1967, would ultimately beget the pomp and spectacle of the National Football League, with its suite-filled stadiums, multibillion-dollar franchises and a national pastime watched by a massive worldwide audience each year. Here's how it all began.

IT STARTED WITH A RIVAL LEAGUE Before there was an NFC and an AFC, the NFL was an old boys' club that didn't want to admit new franchises. A group of frustrated businessmen, led by oilman and Dallas Texans (later the Kansas City Chiefs) owner Lamar Hunt, founded an eight-team league known as the American Football League in 1959.

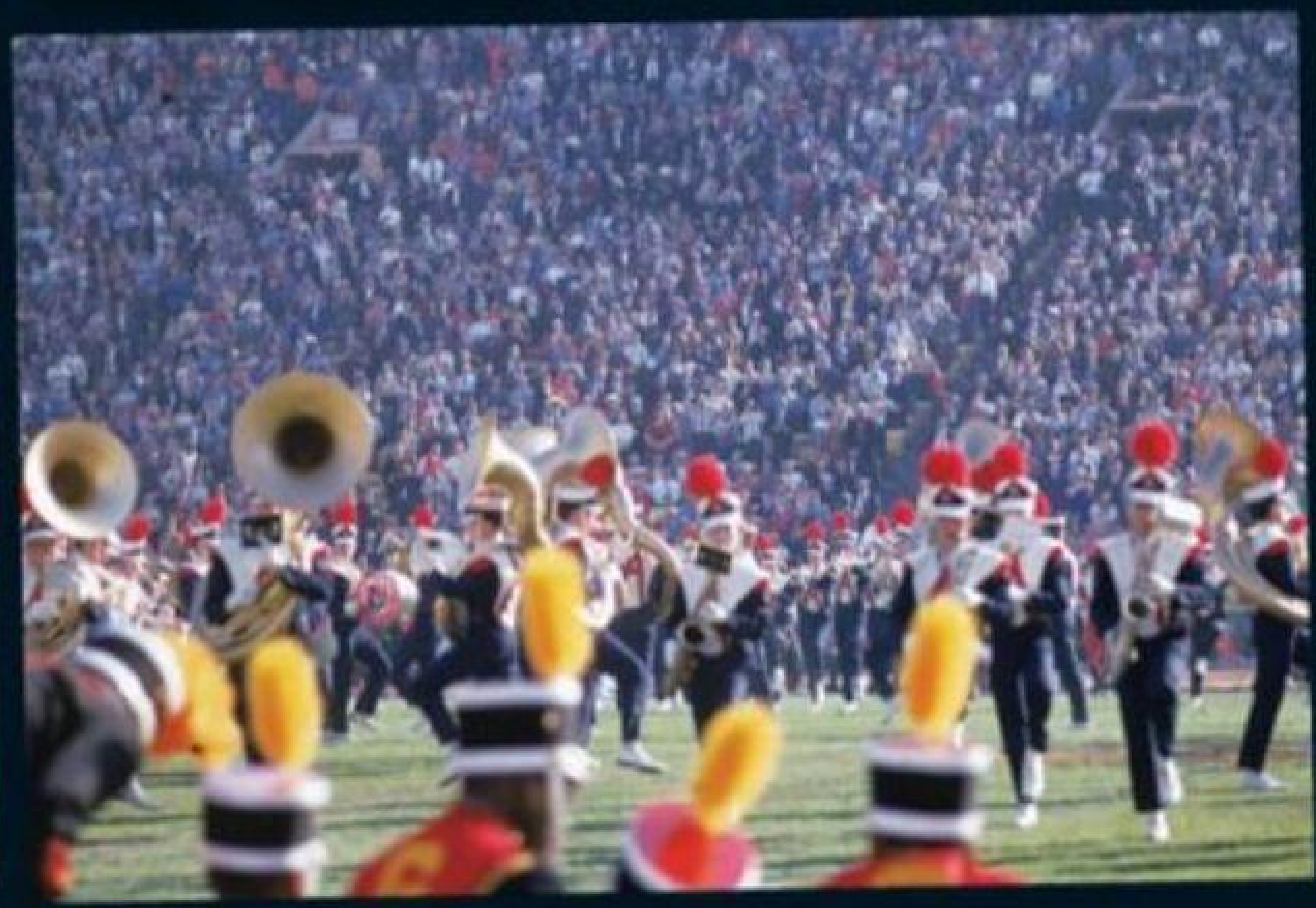
THEN THERE WAS A MERGER By the mid-'60s, the NFL came to realize that the AFL was not just a curiosity but a competitor, a big-money league luring top draft choices. A merger agreement was signed that included a championship game between the winners of each league, to be played at a neutral site: the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

THE FIRST GAME WASN'T KNOWN AS THE SUPER BOWL It was initially known as the AFL-NFL World Championship. Other names considered included The Game and The Merger Bowl. "Super Bowl" was the brainchild of Lamar Hunt, whose children had been playing with a Super Ball. The game was not officially known as the Super Bowl until the Jets played the Colts for the title in 1969 (*see sidebar*).

THERE WAS NO MULTIPLATFORM TV COVERAGE—BUT IT WAS MULTI-NETWORK In a pre-cable, pre-internet, pre-streaming world, the first big game aired on two different networks. Since NBC broadcast AFL regular-season

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: FOCUS ON SPORT/GETTY IMAGES; BETTMAN ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; HEINZ KLUETMEIER/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED/GETTY IMAGES; FOCUS ON SPORT/GETTY IMAGES; NCAA PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES; CBS VIA GETTY IMAGES; LOS ANGELES TIMES/GETTY IMAGES; ROBERT RIGER/GETTY IMAGES; KIDWILER COLLECTION/DIAMOND IMAGES /GETTY IMAGES

JANUARY 15, 1967



HALFTIME WAS QUITE THE TIME The "William Tell Overture" and "The Liberty Bell" march were among the tunes bands serenaded the crowd with, when those in attendance weren't busy watching jet-pack men flying over the Los Angeles Coliseum.

CHANGER

SUPER BOWL I
AFL CHAMPION
NFL CHAMPION
FOR PRO FOOTBALL'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

games, and CBS did the NFL, they both aired it. Fifty-two million viewers watched on both networks, and the average cost for a 30-second advertisement was around $40,000. (Last season, the cost was roughly $7 million.) As to the attendance? The Coliseum was only two-thirds full.

NO BIG STAR SANG THE NATIONAL ANTHEM The likes of Jennifer Hudson, Alicia Keys and Reba McEntire were not there for "The Star-Spangled Banner." Instead, it was played by marching bands from the University of Arizona and the University of Michigan, with vocals by the UCLA choir.

HALFTIME HAD A WEIRD WOW FACTOR Forget the splashy pyrotechnics of current halftimes. Music was performed by the University of Arizona and Grambling College marching bands, accompanied by New Orleans trumpet legend Al Hirt and the Anaheim High School Drill Team. There were also 300 pigeons, 10,000 balloons and, most notably, two men (each wearing a shirt emblazoned with AFL or NFL) in jet-packs flying around 60 feet high.

THE GAME? DAVID VS. GOLIATH, AND GOLIATH WON Green Bay entered the game a 14-point favorite over the Chiefs, with Lombardi (above) having won three NFL championships in the previous seven seasons. After leading 14–10 at halftime, the Packers blew the game open and won 35–10. Starr was named MVP, and the Packers' head coach hoisted the beautiful Duke football-shaped trophy. It's fitting that, in a game steeped in tradition, that same trophy that current Chiefs coach Andy Reid held up last February now bears Lombardi's name.

MEMORABLE SUPER BOWLS

SUPER BOWL III (1969)
NEW YORK JETS: 16,
BALTIMORE COLTS: 7

Joe Namath guaranteed his Jets would beat the heavily favored Colts and delivered the greatest upset in Super Bowl history.

SUPER BOWL XXIII (1989)
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS: 20
CINCINNATI BENGALS: 16

Joe Montana capped an 11-play, 92-yard drive with a TD pass to John Taylor with 34 seconds left to win his third Super Bowl.

SUPER BOWL XXXIV (2000)
ST. LOUIS RAMS: 23
TENNESSEE TITANS: 16

One of the most dramatic Super Bowl endings ever. The Titans nearly tied the game in the final seconds when Kevin Dyson caught a Steve McNair pass but was tackled a yard shy of the end zone.

SUPER BOWL XLII (2008)
NEW YORK GIANTS: 17
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS: 14

The Giants' victory over the undefeated Patriots was highlighted by David Tyree's 32-yard "helmet catch" (above) on third down to keep the game-winning drive alive.

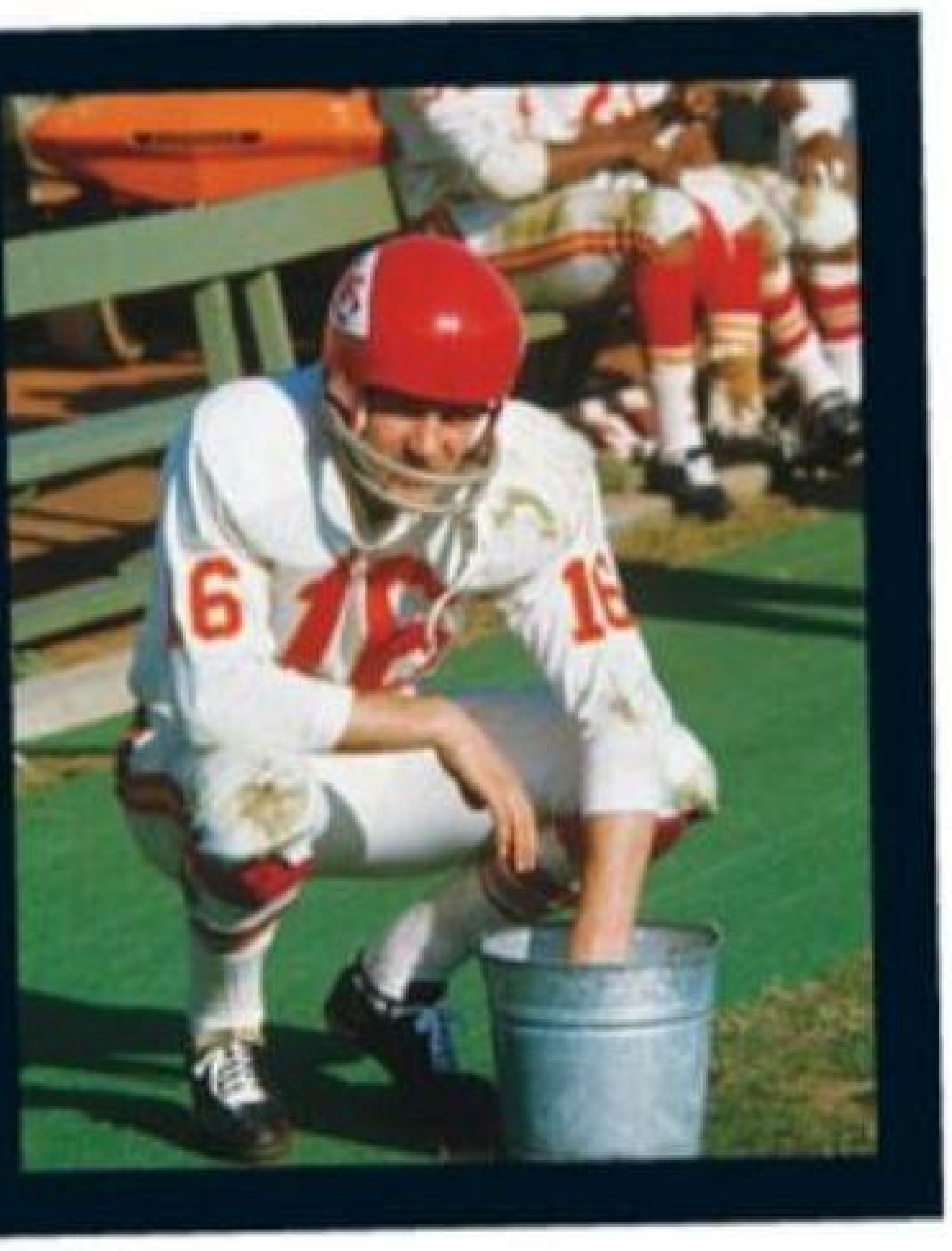
SUPER BOWL XLIX (2015)
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS: 28
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS: 24

A game-saving interception in the end zone and four TD passes by Tom Brady sealed the Patriots' fourth Super Bowl win.

SUPER BOWL LI (2017)
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS: 34
ATLANTA FALCONS: 28

The first overtime game in Super Bowl history saw the Patriots come back from being down 28–3 to beat the Falcons.

GAME TIME NFL favorite Frank Gifford (left, center) was a CBS voice; NBC had Curt Gowdy and its own squad. While the teams made nice before kickoff, Chiefs QB Len Dawson (far right) had a tough go of it.



TV GUIDE

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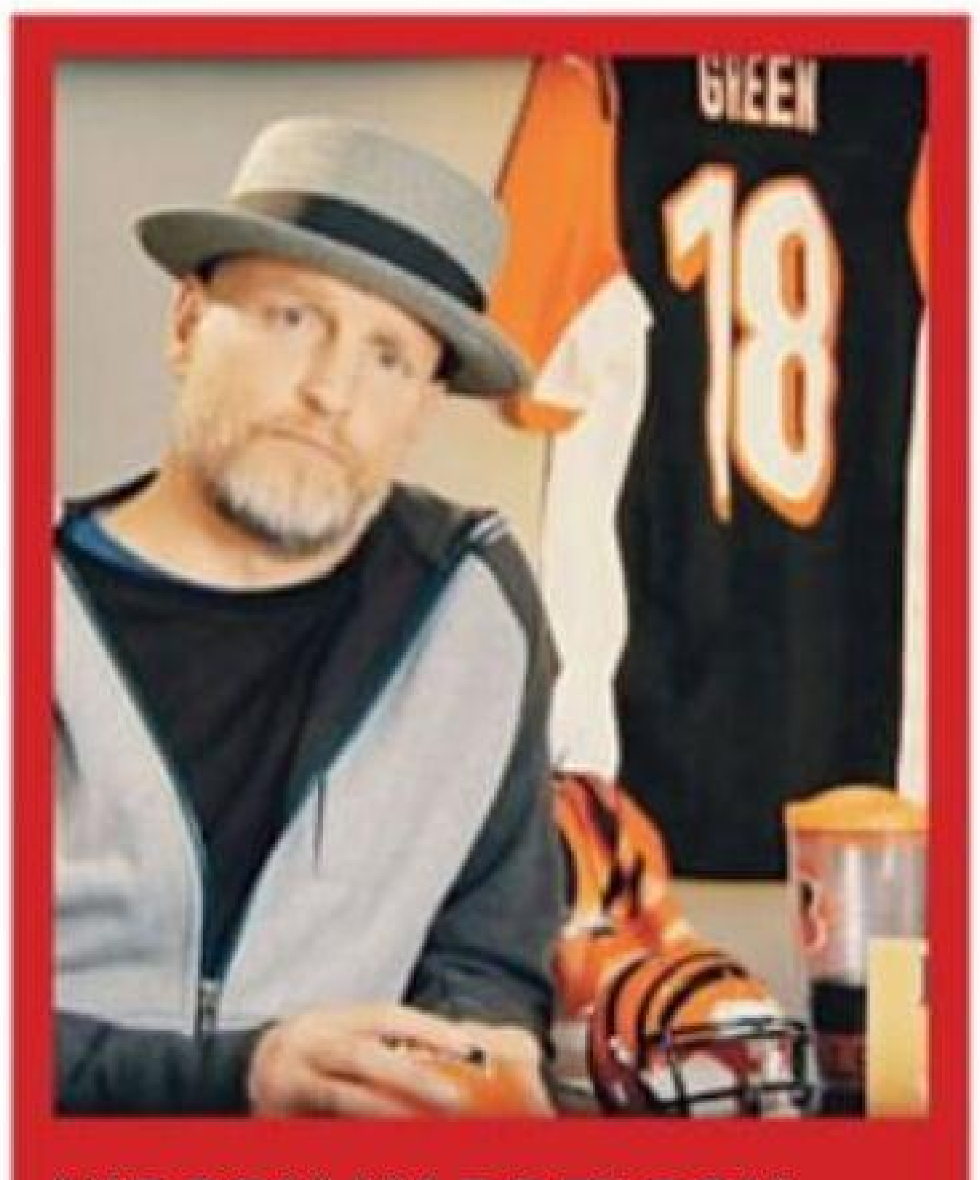
CHRISTINE BARANSKI

BUFFALO BILLS

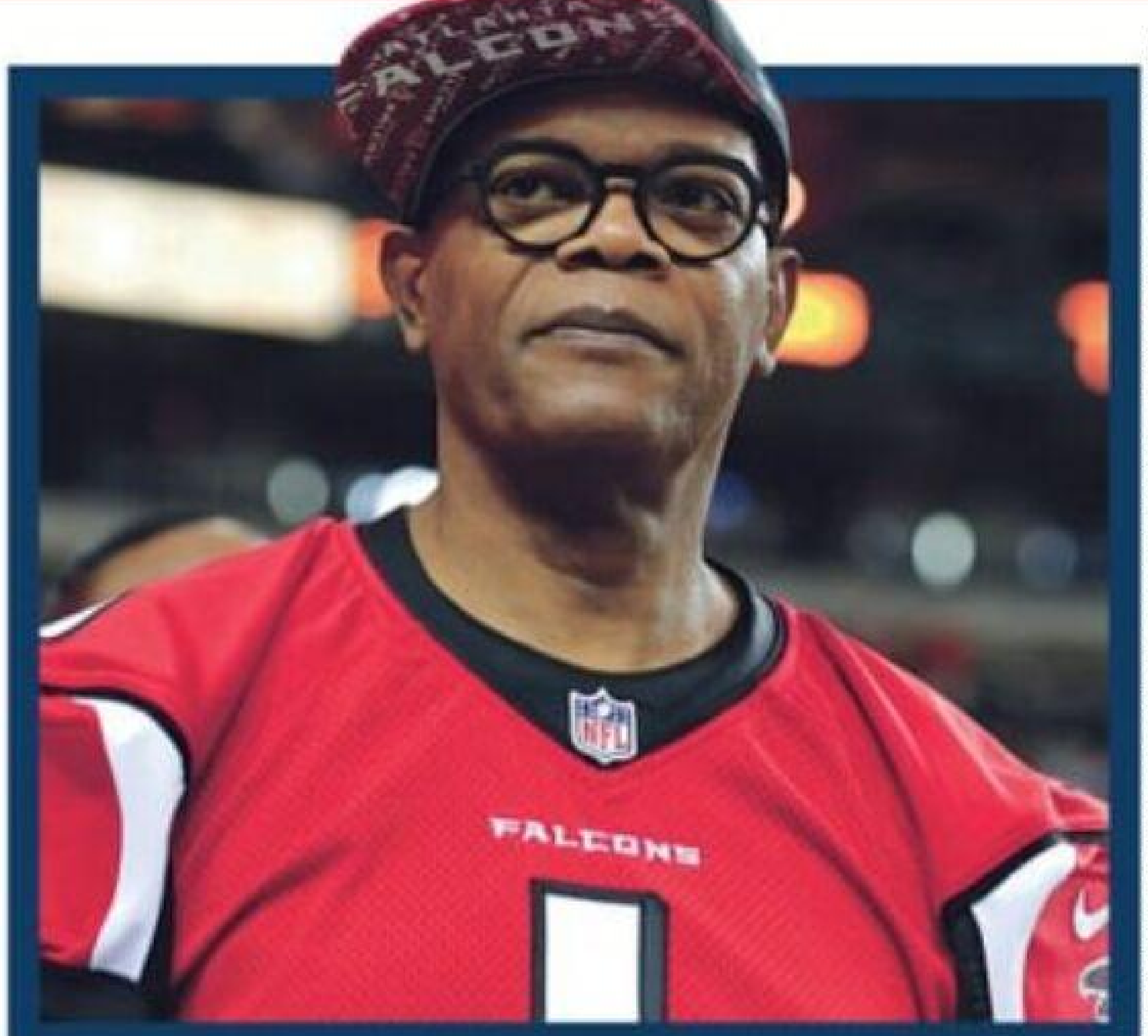
Though she's played sophisticated urbanites on *The Gilded Age* and *The Good Wife*, Baranski, who hails from Buffalo, told Stephen Colbert on *The Late Show* in 2022 that she gets rowdy when her team is having a great season. "People should be alone in a room with me when I watch the Buffalo Bills," she said. "It is loud!"



WOODY HARRELSON

CINCINNATI BENGALS

While Harrelson was starring on *Cheers*, friends invited him to watch a Bengals game, and he got hooked. But from January 6, 1991—four days before a *Cheers* episode aired involving a cursed foosball table—until 2022, Cincinnati didn't win a single playoff game. "It was my fault!" he joked in a gag NFL video. "That foosball table cursed my beloved Bengals!"



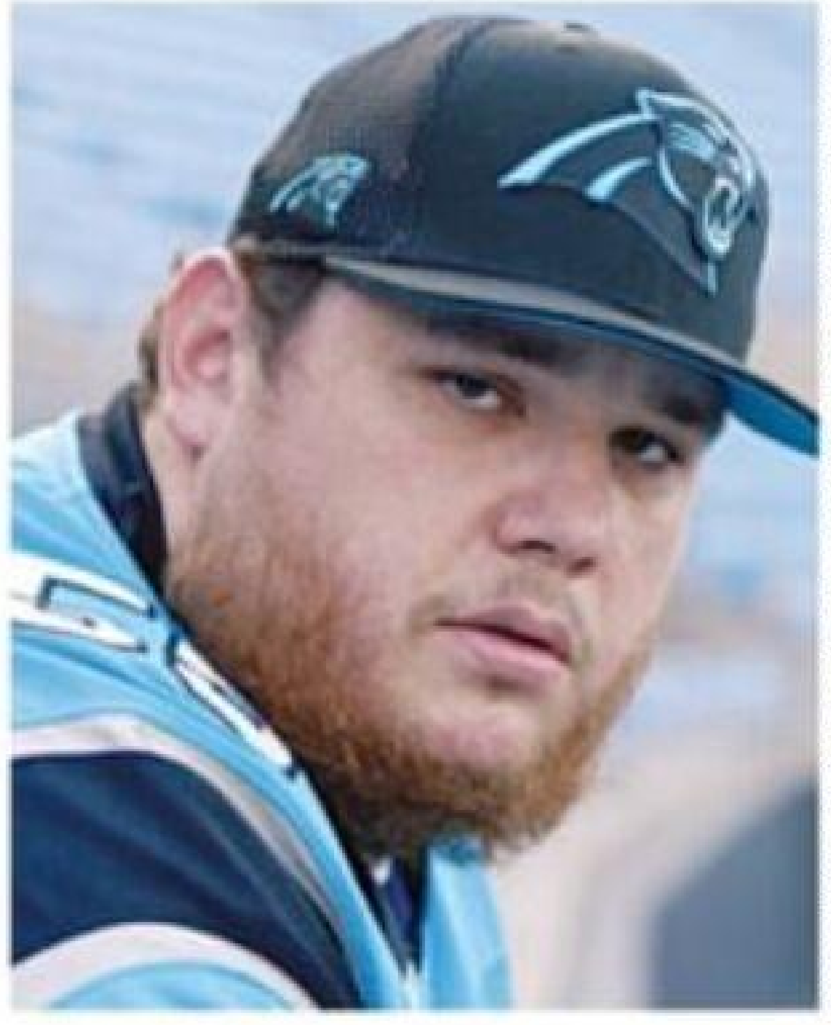
SAMUEL L. JACKSON

ATLANTA FALCONS

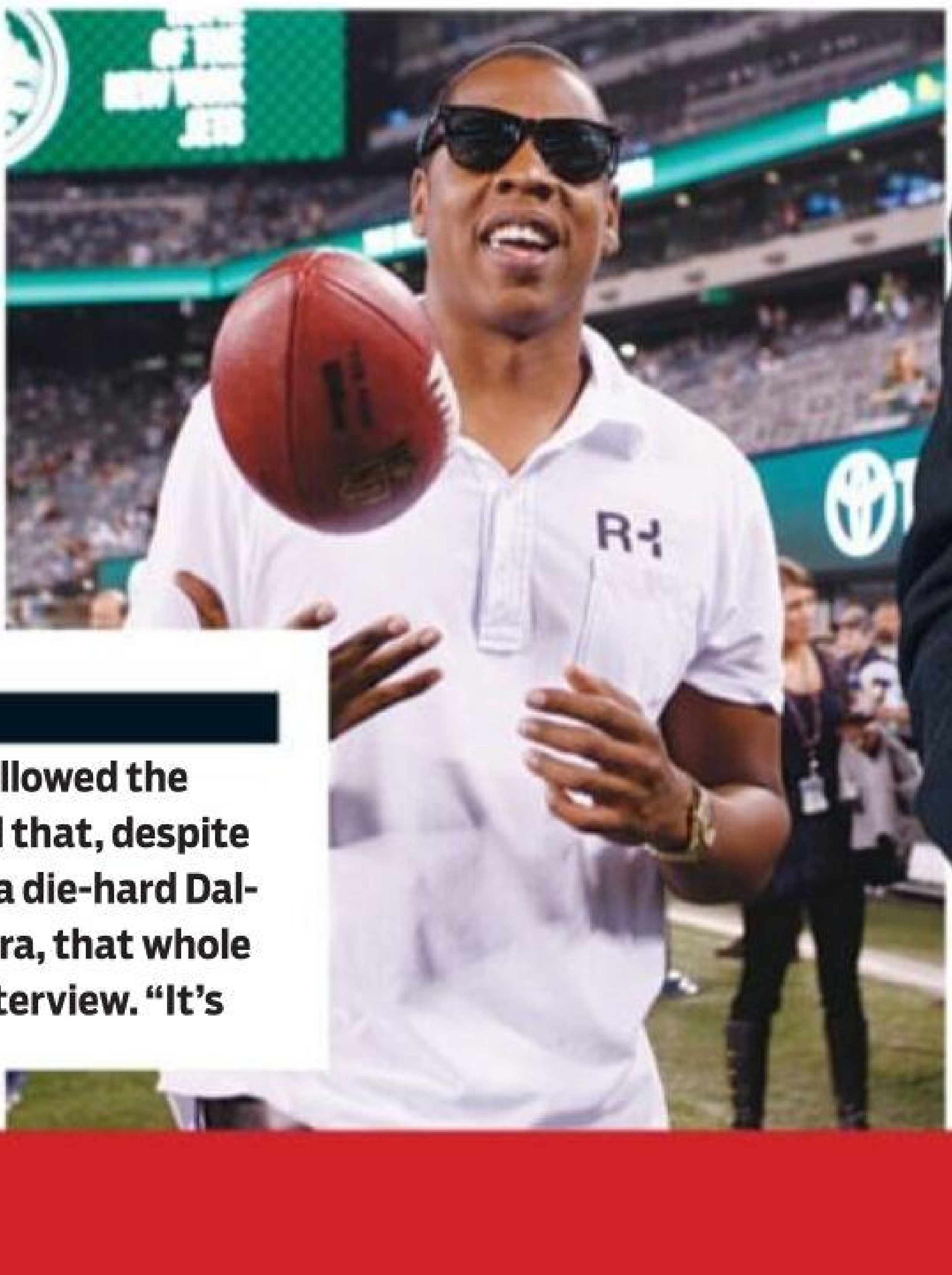
"I went to college in Atlanta," Jackson said on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, describing how his love for the Falcons began. "When I was at Morehouse, the Falcons came to town. I used to work at the stadium," he told the late-night host. The *Pulp Fiction* star went from selling burgers to, now, being invited onto the field to watch warm-ups!

LUKE COMBS

CAROLINA PANTHERS



North Carolina native Combs, whose version of Tracy Chapman's hit "Fast Car" earned a Grammy nod this year, is a lifelong Panthers fan, and he hasn't been hesitant about voicing his opinions. When the Panthers traded former first-round pick Brian Burns to the New York Giants in March, he posted on X: "WHAT ARE WE DOING?!?!?... Are we just fire bombing the whole team here or what?"



JAY-Z

DALLAS COWBOYS

The rap impresario has said his dad followed the Cowboys while he was growing up and that, despite being from New York City, he became a die-hard Dallas fan too. His father relished "that era, that whole Cowboy lifestyle," he said in a radio interview. "It's my pop's team, so I had to watch it."

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FAMOUS FANS

JON BON JOVI
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

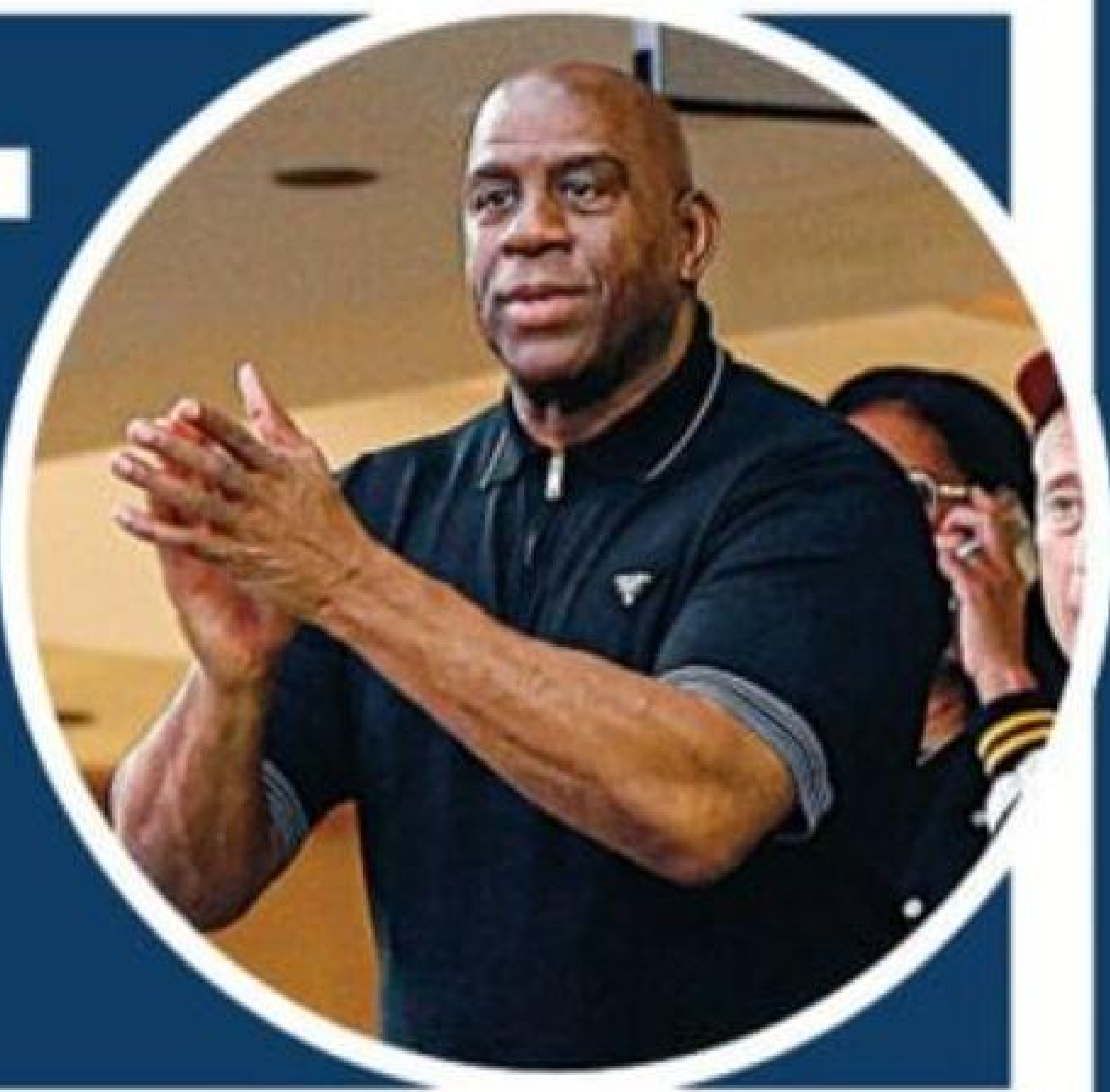
The "Livin' on a Prayer" rocker is good pals with Patriots owner Robert Kraft, and he's attended every training camp at the team's Gillette Stadium since it opened in 2002. "Real leaders lead from the top down, and the whole Patriot Way begins with Robert Kraft and his sense of family," Bon Jovi told *Sports Illustrated*.

TRACY MORGAN
NEW YORK GIANTS

"I've been a Giants fan for a long time," the *30 Rock* actor said on *The Eli Manning Show* webcast. Morgan (left, with Manning) shared that his father and uncle turned him on to the team as a kid as he reminisced with the star quarterback about watching the Giants in the Super Bowl as far back as 1987.

MAGIC JOHNSON
LOS ANGELES RAMS

"Let's go Rams! Deliver another championship to the city of Inglewood. We're ready, let's do it," the former Los Angeles Lakers point guard urged his "home" team in a Facebook video posted in 2022, prior to their Super Bowl win over the Bengals.



EMINEM
DETROIT LIONS

The rapper and Detroit native is a devoted Lions fan who has attended numerous games over the years. After they lost the NFC Championship last January to the 49ers, he posted: "So proud of the @Lions. Thanks 4 an amazing season!!!! We'll be back!!!"

SETH MEYERS
PITTSBURGH STEELERS

The *Late Night With Seth Meyers* host described his tortured love for the Steelers in 2020 on *The Athletic Football Show* podcast as "this thing that I have no control over that has so much control over me." Meyers (above right, with punter Jordan Berry) talked about the emotional arc of the 2023 season: They lost four of their last five games after going 11–0. No laughing matter.

MICHAEL PHELPS (Olympic swimmer) Baltimore Ravens

BILL MURRAY (actor) Chicago Bears

DREW CAREY (*The Price Is Right* host) Cleveland Browns

KATE HUDSON (actress) Denver Broncos

DENNIS QUAID (actor) Houston Texans

GENE HACKMAN (actor) Jacksonville Jaguars

CARLOS SANTANA (musician) Las Vegas Raiders

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER (actor) Los Angeles Chargers

DARIUS RUCKER (singer) Miami Dolphins

JOSH DUHAMEL (actor) Minnesota Vikings

BRADLEY COOPER (actor-director) Philadelphia Eagles

JEREMY RENNER (actor) San Francisco 49ers

WILL FERRELL (actor) Seattle Seahawks

HULK HOGAN (wrestler) Tampa Bay Buccaneers

TIM MCGRAW (singer) Tennessee Titans

MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY (actor) Washington Commanders

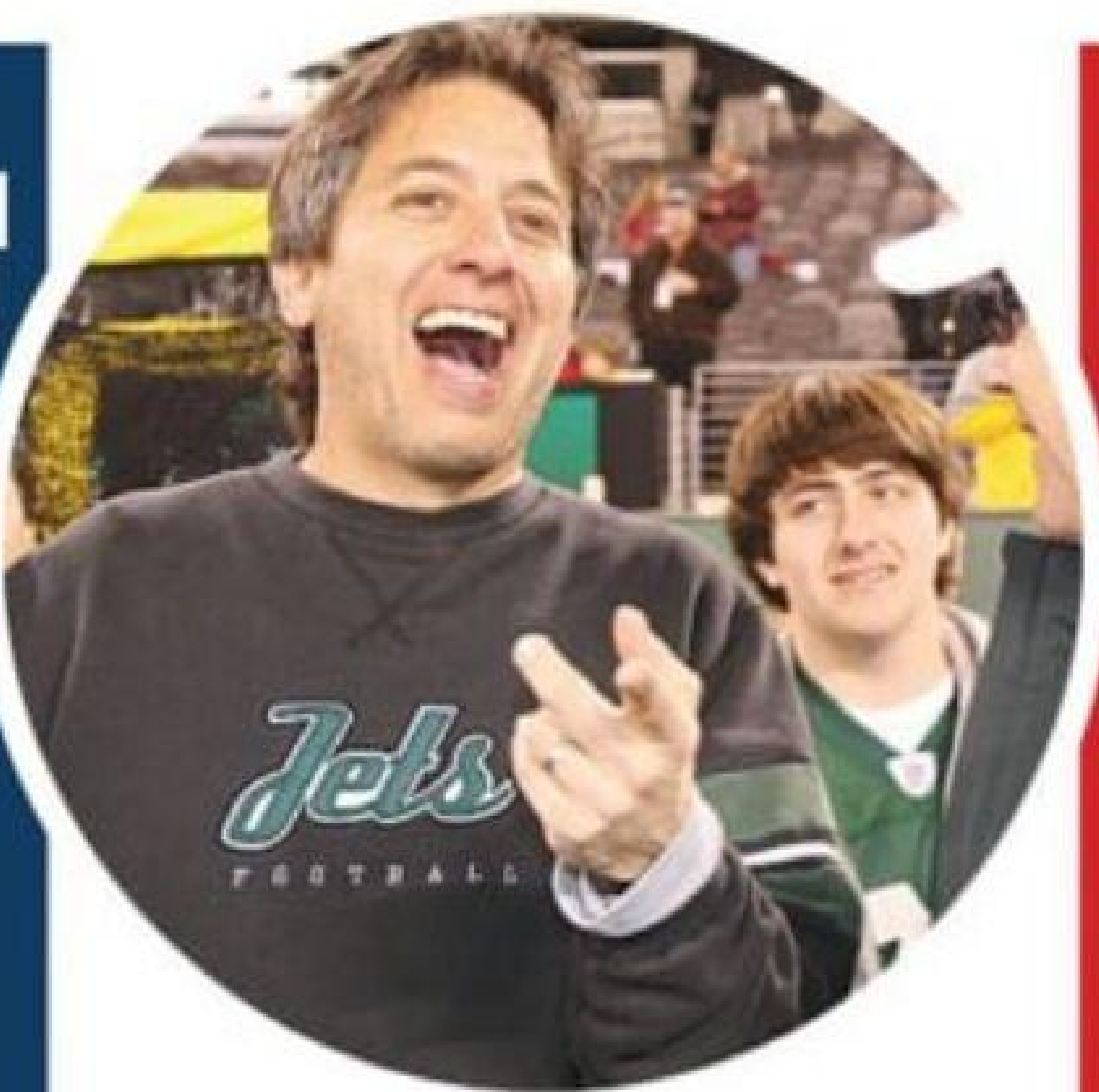
These stars get loud and proud about pulling for their favorite teams

FAMOUS FANS

JODIE FOSTER

GREEN BAY PACKERS

The Oscar winner told talk show host Kelly Clarkson that she's a member of an over-60 women's fantasy football league and shared that she's a Green Bay fan. "My friend has a genuine real Super Bowl ring, so she let me wear it," Foster raved while showing it off in a picture of herself in a cheese hat.



RAY ROMANO

NEW YORK JETS

"Every year, I get my hopes up and I'm optimistic, and it just doesn't pan out," the New York City native and longtime Jets fan told Fox News in 2023 of his team, which hasn't made it to the Super Bowl since 1969. "But I'm never going to give up," the *Everybody Loves Raymond* star pledged.

TAYLOR SWIFT

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

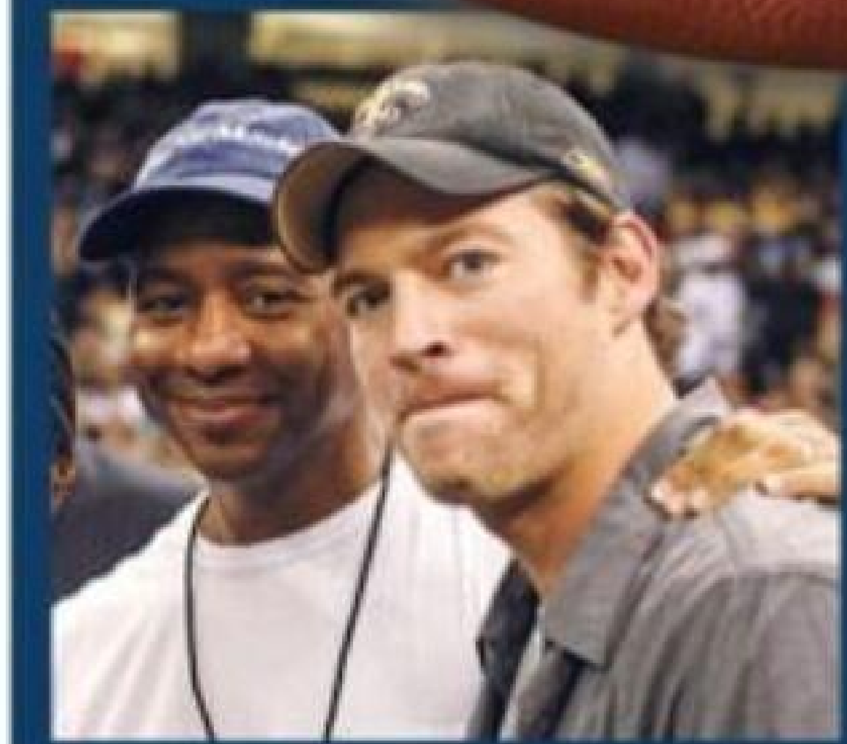
In between gigs for her colossal Eras Tour, the global megastar showed up for 13 Chiefs games in 2023–24 as her relationship with tight end Travis Kelce grew into a love story. Not previously a big football fan, the "Shake It Off" singer told *Time*, "Football is awesome, it turns out. I've been missing out my whole life!"

BLAKE SHELTON

ARIZONA CARDINALS

The country singer (below, with wife Gwen Stefani) comes from Oklahoma, but he's been following the Cardinals since the early 2000s. His "favorite thing about being a fan of the Arizona Cardinals are the people there," he's said. "That's my logo; the red bird is what I love."

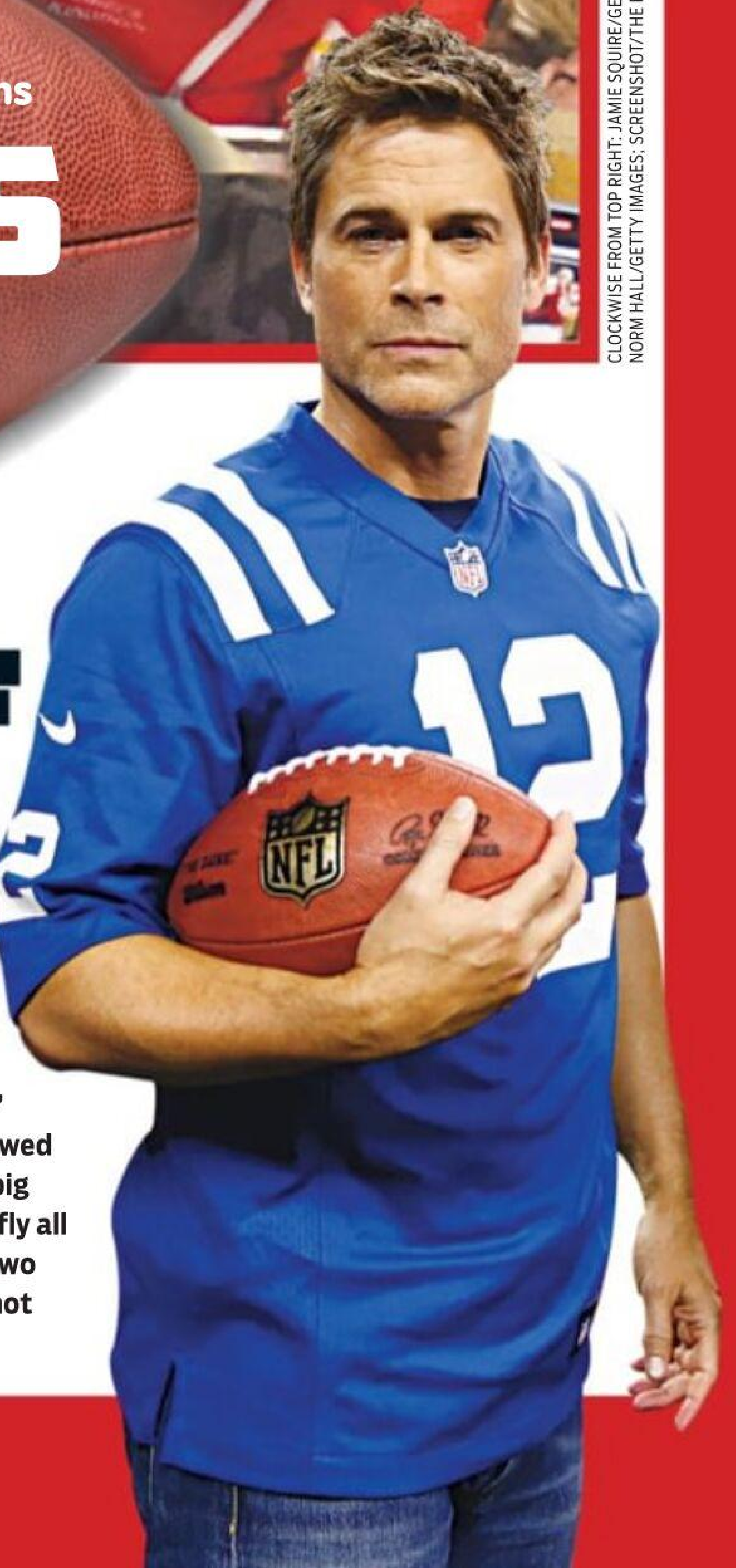
ARIZONA
CARDINALS



HARRY CONNICK JR.

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

Connick (right, with fellow musician Branford Marsalis) often sings the praises of his hometown team. In 2017 he crooned, "Clip them wings of the dirty birds" for a Facebook video when the Saints were to play the Falcons.



ROB LOWE

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

The *Parks & Rec* actor has been a Colts fan for years, traveling to see games as far back as their 2010 Super Bowl. "My son Johnny is an even bigger Colts fan than I am," he said when he showed up in Miami for the big game. "We couldn't fly all the way to Indiana two weeks in a row and not come here!"

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